

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1897.

PEACE WITH HONOUR.

BY SYDNEY C. GRIER, AUTHOR OF "IN FURTHEST IND," ETC.

CHAPTER IX.

A SPELL OF STORMY WEATHER.

ON the following morning there was no change to be observed in the aspect of the Mission. Only the gentlemen of the party were acquainted with the fact of the Vizier's sudden declaration of war, and they shared Sir Dugald's opinion that it would be bad policy to allow Fath-ud-Din to see that his threats had any effect upon their minds. The great gates were therefore opened as usual to allow the customary throng of country-people and other sellers of fresh provisions to enter and hold their market in the outer court, and the flag, hoisted at sunrise, floated proudly from its staff in front of Bachelors' Buildings.

Fitz Anstruther left the Mission early that morning on an errand of his own. He had set his heart on getting Miss Keeling a Persian kitten in the bazaar, and immediately after disposing of his *chota hazri* he induced the interpreter to come out with him for this purpose, as although he had succeeded in making an Ethiopian audience understand his scientific lecture, he felt a well-grounded distrust of his own powers of conducting a bargain in the currency of the country. The absence of the two was soon discovered; but although Sir Dugald testified some displeasure when he found that Kustendjian was not at hand to go on with the drafting of the treaty, no anxiety was felt as to their safety, since none of the staff had hesitated to go about the city without an escort after the first week of their stay there.

It was considered advisable to take no notice of the Vizier's visit, and to exhibit a readiness to continue the negotiations as before, and therefore Sir Dugald and his staff assembled as usual in what was called the Durbar-hall, a large airy room on the ground-floor of

Bachelors' Buildings. Here they awaited the appearance either of Kustendjian or of an emissary from the Palace, Dr. Headlam lingering for a talk before betaking himself to his expectant patients opposite. He had just heaved a sigh and taken up his helmet, preparatory to seeking his own domain, when a distant sound, gradually increasing in volume, broke upon the ears of those in the room. It might have been rolling thunder, or the roar of wild beasts, or the rush of a torrent; but there was no reason why it should be any of these. Sir Dugald raised his head and listened attentively.

"I have heard that in the Mutiny," he said. "The town is up about something, and they are coming this way. Have you all your revolvers here, gentlemen?"

Each man produced his weapon promptly, and Sir Dugald led the way out on the verandah, the whole party holding their breath to listen to the sound. The servants had noticed it also, and were standing about in the courtyard with pale faces, listening intently. Some, as the noise grew nearer, crept back to their own quarters in terror, others gathered in a group and looked to their masters for orders.

"Turn all those Ethiopians out," said Sir Dugald, pointing to the salesmen and women who had been exhibiting their wares in the courtyard, "and shut the gates."

No further command was needed. The servants obeyed the order zealously, bundling the unhappy country-people out neck and crop, and throwing their possessions after them. But before they could clear the courtyard of the bewildered and terrified crowd there was a fresh commotion at the gateway, and Fitz forced his way in, followed by Kustendjian, and rushed up to Sir Dugald.

"There's a regular howling mob coming this way, sir!" he cried. "We saw old Fath-ud-Din's steward, who goes to the Palace with him, and another man, stirring them up against us in the bazaar, and when we came away they followed us, and then chased us. They are saying that we have annexed the country, and that the flag is the sign of it. They mean to tear it down."

"Ah!" said Sir Dugald quietly, stepping down from the verandah. "Put your revolvers into your pockets, gentlemen; we won't use them at present. Fetch your riding-whips, if you please, or a good strong lithe cane, if you have one, any of you. We will not shed blood unless we are driven to it."

The young men rushed to their quarters for the required weapons, returning to find Sir Dugald standing beside the flag-staff with his revolver in his hand. The confusion at the gate had been increased by the arrival of the mob outside, for they found themselves faced not only by the servants who were doing their best to close the doors, but by the mixed multitude of their own people who were in process of being expelled. But the piles of merchandise thrown down

or dropped in the gateway made it impossible for the doors to be shut, and Sir Dugald turned to Fitz.

"Go back to the verandah, Mr. Anstruther, and blow your whistle to call the servants in. Concentrate them in the front rooms on that floor, and serve out the rifles and ammunition; but, remember, not a shot is to be fired so long as we are out here. It would be the death of all of us. If we are driven in we will bring the flag with us; but, until we come, you fire at your peril."

As Fitz obeyed, and the sound of his whistle rang out clear and shrill, penetrating even the hubbub at the gate, and causing the servants to abandon their futile efforts and turn to run to the house, Sir Dugald addressed his companions.

"Stratford, you are the tallest. Keep your revolver out, and stand by the flag-staff. Shoot down the first man that lays a hand on the halliards. No; on second thoughts I will take that post myself. It is possible that I am a little cooler in the head than you, and it is certain that you are a good deal stronger of arm than I am. Take your places in front of the flag, gentlemen; that's it. Your business is to let no one pass you. This is not an armed mob; it is just Fath-ud-Din's *badmashes*, and sticks and whips ought to keep them back. I needn't tell you to lay it on well. Never mind how hard you hit."

"Here they come!" said the doctor; and as the last servant broke out of the crowd by the gate and fled to the house the mob burst in with a roar. They made straight for the flag, but paused and recoiled at the sight of the three younger men with their whips and Sir Dugald, revolver in hand, leaning idly against the flag-staff.

"Not much pluck in *them*!" muttered Dick disgustedly; but as though they had understood the disparaging words, the mob gathered their courage together and came on again. In a moment the younger men found themselves engaged in a furious hand-to-hand encounter, in which fists and whips were opposed to the force of numbers. Fitz declared afterwards that he could hear over all the din of the struggle, the sound of the blows as they fell, although the howling of those who received them ought to have drowned the noise. Once or twice Sir Dugald raised his revolver and let it drop again, for in the whole course of the short, sharp fight, no one actually got within the ring of defenders, and presently Fitz, exceeding his orders, seized the psychological instant for a most opportune diversion. Besides rifles, he had provided the servants with all the sticks he could muster; and when he saw the mob begin to give way, he led forth half his force to clear the courtyard. Fear of the defenders plainly visible at the windows had hitherto kept the space between the flag-staff and the house free of intruders, and now the sturdy frontiersmen, covered by the rifles of their friends behind, advanced against the foe, laying about them as they came with hearty good will. Gradually the mob yielded their ground. Firing they might perhaps have faced;

but this extremely unheroic method of fighting disgusted them with the sport. As the defenders closed their ranks and pressed them more hardly, the retreat became a rout, nay, a headlong race—an obstacle race—in which every man was eager to save his back from blows. The last remnants of the mob struggled through the gateway at last, and the courtyard was clear, and the honour of the flag maintained, without the shedding of a drop of blood.

"Clear that rubbish away and close the gates," said Sir Dugald. "We will keep them shut in future, and the people must bring their things to sell in the street outside. That market of theirs nearly did for us to-day."

Although the non-arrival of any help from the authorities might have led to the conclusion that the riot had been inaudible in other parts of the city, no sooner was it over, and the enemy driven out, than an official appeared from the King to congratulate the victors—exactly, said Fitz, as he would have done had the result gone the other way, save that his congratulations might then have had a little sincerity in them. But the messenger who came to congratulate went away grave, for Sir Dugald committed to him a full statement of the morning's proceedings, to be laid before the King, with the intimation that unless apologies were at once offered, and the instigators of the demonstration punished, the negotiations would be broken off forthwith and the Mission would return to Khemistan. There was no doubt that it was exceedingly injudicious of Fath-ud-din to have allowed his servants to be seen stirring up the mob, and the official turned over in his mind in deep perplexity the relative disadvantages of offending the Vizier by informing the King of the truth, and on the other hand, of angering the King if Sir Dugald took his departure, and the facts which had brought it about became known.

How the messenger settled matters with his conscience was unknown for the present to the party at the Mission, for their next visitor was Mr. Hicks, who flew to the spot on the wings of zeal the moment that the news of the outbreak reached him. Stratford declared that his countenance expressed deep disappointment when he realised that the courtyard was not filled with the dead and dying, and that the flag hung unscathed; but the doctor maintained that he was prejudiced, and that Mr. Hicks had hurried to offer his help in the defence, heedless of the danger he might incur in meeting the defeated mob. However this might be, Mr. Hicks warmed with enthusiasm when he was told the story of the morning, and finally advanced to Sir Dugald and grasped him by the hand.

"General," he said; "shake! You are a white man, you are. You have licked that poor ordinary crowd of niggers in a way to earn you the eternal gratitude of every Western stranger that circumstances may drive to sojourn in this uncared-for State. But I guess that your troubles are only beginning, sir."

"Possibly," said Sir Dugald, with perfect unconcern.

"Well, if things look black, you have only to pass me the word, General, and I will vamoose my ranche yonder and come and give you a hand. I should be right down proud to fight shoulder to shoulder with the man that turned back that mob without shedding a drop of blood."

"You are very kind," said Sir Dugald, with a complete lack of enthusiasm. "I can assure you that things must go very badly with us before we seek to involve you in our troubles"—a reply delivered with so much urbanity, that Mr. Hicks could not at first decide whether his offer was accepted or refused.

The next visitor appeared in the course of the afternoon, and was no other than the Grand Vizier himself. It was evident that the royal messenger had decided upon telling his master the truth, for Fath-ud-Din came to offer suitable apologies for the conduct of his retainers. The steward, he said, was an old family servant, who, in his intercourse with his master, had imbibed from him such exalted ideas of patriotism, that on hearing the treaty discussed, and conceiving that it was unduly advantageous to England, he had felt moved to stir up the townspeople against it, his religious zeal being also inflamed by the memories and hardships incidental to the month of Ramadan, which had just ended. The other instigator of the outbreak was a young theological student, a member of a class which was often unruly and troublesome, and had great influence with the people. It was preposterous to imagine that the Vizier could have had any knowledge of the doings of these two fanatics, and he had come to declare his sorrow that it had been in the power of such wretches not only to annoy and alarm the Mission, but also to involve in their disgrace his own spotless name. He had given immediate orders that they were both to be severely punished, and if Sir Dugald liked, he would have them brought in and bastinadoed before him, so that he might assure himself that they had received their deserts. In any case (as Sir Dugald politely declined the proffered satisfaction for himself, while intimating that he would send a representative to see that the punishment was duly carried out) he brought assurances that the King of all kings felt the deepest regret for the way in which things had turned out, and entreated that the Envoy would not withdraw the light of his countenance from Kubbet-ul-Haj, but would overlook the fright and annoyance which had been caused to the Mission, and remain in Ethiopia to complete the conclusion of the treaty.

"Fright?" said Sir Dugald; for the Vizier had emphasised the word, and repeated it more than once in different forms, "I saw no particular signs of fright about our people. What we felt was more like disgust. Apart from the violation of courtesy and propriety in the attack made on the flag, it was disagreeably close work down in the court there with that crowd pressing all round us."

"Ah, my lord the Envoy is a soldier, and knows not fear, and his

young men are brave also," replied Fath-ud-Din, stroking his beard; "but the women—my lord's household—surely their hearts became as water when they heard the shouts of the people?"

"This is the first I have heard of it, if they did," replied Sir Dugald, "but then, I was not in a position to observe their behaviour. Mr. Anstruther, you were in command at the rear. What were the ladies doing while the fighting was going on? Was there any fainting or screaming?"

"Oh no, sir. The ladies were on our roof here, watching the fun."

"But that was extremely injudicious. If we had been obliged to evacuate Bachelors' Buildings, their presence would have added immensely to our difficulties. You should have ordered them down, and insisted on their returning to their own quarters."

"So I did, sir." There was a gleam of fun in Fitz's eyes. "I ran up there myself to insist with greater effect, and they laughed at me. It was flat mutiny, but I could not spare sufficient men to put them under arrest."

"Ah, the women were driven mad by terror. Their feet were weighed down so that they could not move," said Fath-ud-Din pityingly, when this had been translated to him.

"And just at the beginning, sir," Fitz went on to Sir Dugald, "when there was that crush in the gateway, Miss Keeling sent her maid down to ask me whether I couldn't tell the people not to move about quite so much, because she wanted to sketch them. That was how I first found out that Lady Haigh and she were up there, but I didn't think that the remark showed a proper sense of the seriousness of the situation. I assure you that it pained me very much, sir."

"Just translate that to the Vizier, Mr. Kustendjian," said Sir Dugald, but again incredulity was written on Fath-ud-Din's face.

"Surely my lord knows as I do," he said, "that the young man is one of those who delight to laugh at the beards of their elders, and to utter the thing that is not true, to the confusion of their own faces?"

"I see that we shall have to convince this gentleman by the evidence of his own senses," remarked Sir Dugald, addressing no one in particular. "Mr. Anstruther, would you be good enough to find out what the ladies are doing now?"

"They are working on the terrace, sir," said Fitz, returning, "and the servants are just bringing in afternoon tea."

"Very well. Be so good as to ask Lady Haigh to have coffee brought in as well, and tell her that Fath-ud-Din is coming to pay her a visit. She and Miss Keeling had better put on those veils of theirs, by-the-bye, for we don't want any more complications introduced into this business."

Fitz departed on his errand in high glee, and when a decent interval had been allowed for the transformation to be effected, Sir

Dugald, after a few preliminary remarks tending to impress Fath-ud-Din with a sense of the greatness of the honour about to be conferred upon him, led his guest into the inner courtyard, and up the steps to the terrace. Here, indeed, there was little sign of panic. There were books and work about, and Georgia's sketching materials were visible in a corner. She herself had the Persian kitten, which Fitz had brought home in his pocket in the morning, asleep on her lap, while Lady Haigh was pouring out tea with a hand in which the keenest gaze could not distinguish the slightest tendency to tremble. The Vizier looked disappointed—this is putting it mildly, for the young men agreed afterwards that his expression was fiendish—but he appeared to be reflecting that the veils in which his hostesses were shrouded might be serving a useful purpose in concealing the traces of fear, for presently he turned to Sir Dugald.

"Let not my lord be offended if I entreat him to inquire of his household whether terror did not seize them this morning," he said, meekly enough.

"By no means," returned Sir Dugald genially. "Elma, the Vizier would like to know whether you were frightened when his people were kicking up that row in the courtyard?"

"Frightened?" snapped Lady Haigh. "What was there to be frightened about, I should like to know?" The measureless scorn in her eyes and voice evidently reached Fath-ud-Din in spite of the double barrier of the foreign language and the *burka*, for he swallowed his cupful of scalding coffee hastily, and it was necessary to recover him from a choking fit before he could proceed with his inquiry.

"Then will my lord ask the doctor-lady, who has no husband to protect her with the might of his arm and the power of his name, whether she was not terrified?" he asked.

"Frightened?" returned Georgia, when the question had been put to her. "Oh dear no! I have a revolver. I think," she added carelessly, after a pause to let the information she had just given sink in, "that it was only the kitten which was frightened. Poor little thing! It was in a pitiable state when I rescued it from Mr. Anstruther's coat-pocket."

"By the head of our lord the King!" burst out Fath-ud-Din, rising hurriedly, "these are no women, but fighting men!"

"Isn't it worth your while, then, to strain a point in order to gain an alliance with a nation that has such women?" asked Sir Dugald, seizing the opportunity to point a moral.

"Nay, rather," said the Vizier, retreating to the steps as he spoke, "what are we doing to admit within our borders a nation whose very women are of such a temper as this?"

"I'm sure that was the sweetest compliment that the New Woman has ever received," said Dick to Georgia, as Sir Dugald, followed by Stratford and Fitz, escorted his discomfited guest across the courtyard.

"Major North," said Lady Haigh briskly, "I consider that you are distinctly rude to your Chief's wife. I don't know whether you mean to deny me a share in Fath-ud-Din's pretty speech, or to insinuate that I am a New Woman; but, in either case, I think that your conduct is sadly lacking in respect."

"I don't think Major North meant to be rude, Lady Haigh," said Georgia, playing with the kitten's tail. "His tongue ran away with him. It is a habit it has sometimes."

"I apologise humbly, Lady Haigh," said Dick. "In any case, what I have just heard would have forced me to believe that the New Woman was very like the old one. Now if either you or Miss Keeling would do me the honour of having the last word, my submission would be complete."

"The question is," said Sir Dugald, returning to the tea-table with Stratford while Lady Haigh and Georgia were still laughing, "what was it exactly that Fath-ud-Din hoped to gain by this attack on us?"

"Then you don't think he was trying to wipe out the Mission at one blow?" asked Stratford.

"No I don't, unless he hoped that we should be provoked into firing on the mob, when the whole country would have risen against us. But I don't fancy that was his game. I think he must have been trying to terrify us into withdrawing from Ethiopia at once, or else into bribing him largely to get the treaty signed immediately."

"I think he has received a little enlightenment as to the possibility of squeezing us," said Dick with a grim smile. "My only cause for misgiving is a doubt whether the ladies could ever again rise to the superhuman height of heroism they displayed just now. Any weakening in that attitude in the presence of danger might lead to unfavourable remarks."

"He is trying to punish us for what we said just now, Georgia," said Lady Haigh amiably. "Never mind; when the danger comes he shall see whether either of us weakens, as Mr. Hicks would say."

And the matter dropped amidst general laughter, which was perhaps what Dick wanted, for after tea he asked for an interview with Sir Dugald, and laid before him various expedients for rendering the Mission more easily defensible. These measures he was authorised to adopt, but without alarming the ladies, and he flattered himself that he was successful in this, and that Lady Haigh and Georgia never perceived that he drilled the servants each morning in the outer court, or that he had divided them into watches, each of which took its turn in remaining under arms. He had the more reason for this belief of his, in that the ladies had other things to think of, for matters seemed to have quieted down, and Georgia went to the Palace as usual, while Sir Dugald's audiences of the King were resumed, the subject of discussion at present being the

exact wording of the treaty, the provisions of which had already been agreed upon.

It was noticed by the members of the Mission that the King's manner seemed to have changed since the outbreak, and that he was by no means so easy to please as he had been. He cavilled at points which had been definitely settled, and gave the impression that he considered the treaty extremely disadvantageous to Ethiopia. This was the more serious in that Jahan Beg reported the reappearance upon the scene of the Scythian agent, with larger presents and more abundant promises, and was calculated to suggest that the King wished to irritate Sir Dugald into breaking off the negotiations. But long experience of the East had made Sir Dugald the most patient of men—in public—and his staff were astonished at the mildness with which he altered the wording of a clause again and again, without ever abating one jot of the concessions he had determined to obtain. His mingled tact and resolution carried the day at last. The treaty was agreed upon in its entirety, and after being engrossed on parchment by the King's scribes, was read through to the Envoy, behind whom stood the interpreter Kustendjian, ready to mark the slightest deviation from the prescribed formula. There now remained only the actual signing of the convention, and it was arranged that Fath-ud-Din should bring the instrument, bearing the seals of the King and the Grand Vizier, to the Mission in the morning, there to receive Sir Dugald's signature, after which the British expedition might take its departure peacefully and honourably from Kubbet-ul-Haj.

The day on which the treaty was to be signed was an important one also to Georgia, for she had decided, after much consultation with Dr. Headlam, who could not, of course, see the patient, but who gave all the advice that his experience of like cases suggested to him, to undertake at last the operation on the Queen's eyes. The state of the patient's general health was not yet as satisfactory as her doctor could have desired, but when any day might bring about the departure of the Mission, Georgia felt that she dared not delay longer. Even as it was, there was little hope that she would be able to be present when, after the necessary interval, the bandages could be removed from the Queen's eyes, and her professional conscience was troubled at the possibility of leaving her work only half-done. But Sir Dugald was far too anxious to get his followers safely out of Ethiopia to be willing to spend a week or a fortnight longer in the country in order that Georgia might see the result of her handiwork, and all she could do was to explain everything very carefully, with Rahah's help, to Nur Jahan, and give her full directions in case of the occurrence of various possible contingencies. The actual operation was performed without a hitch, and Georgia felt deeply relieved as she fastened the bandages, impressing on the Queen and all her attendants that they were on no account to be removed until the specified time had elapsed.

The Mission was not likely, in any case, to take its departure until three or four days had passed, and she promised to come in again at least once more in order to note the patient's state, and oftener if she were summoned.

Nur Jahan escorted her to the door of the harem, plying her with questions as to the treatment the patient ought to receive, and the means by which Georgia had gained her medical skill. The girl had already proved herself such an apt pupil that Georgia sighed again over the thought that a medical career was an impossibility for her, but she kept her promise loyally to Jahan Beg. The litter was not ready when they reached the harem courtyard, and while it was being prepared she stood in the doorway talking to Nur Jahan, but leaving the questions as to her own hospital experiences unanswered, devoted the time to reiterating her directions for the Queen's treatment. Presently a burst of laughter and loud talking reached her ears from the rooms on the other side of the courtyard, and she looked across at a balcony in which the forms of several women could be descried. They were evidently attendants on the King's second wife, Antar Khan's mother, who was frantically jealous of her rival owing to her monopoly of the services of the doctor-lady, and who had shown this feeling in various unpleasant ways. She was far too proud to invite a visit from Georgia, or even to feign illness as an excuse for summoning her, and therefore she and her faction chose to regard the doctor-lady as the dirt under their feet. They drew aside their clothes when they passed her, affected to consider the rooms in which she had been received as unclean, and seized every opportunity of insulting her from a safe distance.

The adherents of Rustam Khan's mother, on the other hand, fully appreciated the reason for this state of things, and exulted over their opponents on every possible occasion. They prided themselves on their exclusive possession of the doctor-lady, and would have rejoiced in an opportunity of denying her services to the opposite party in a case of dangerous illness. They had just shouted across the courtyard the news of the satisfactory performance of the operation, and their rivals were naturally moved to wrath. Hence they had assembled in their balcony to point the finger of scorn at Georgia, and to jeer at her and Nur Jahan, whose own position in the Palace was so uncertain that she dared not run the risk of getting her husband into disgrace by appealing to the King.

"Thou art very proud, O doctor-lady," cried a strong-lunged damsel, leaning over the rail of the balcony, "but when next we see thee thou wilt be entreating mercy at our lady's feet."

Rahah translated the prophecy to her mistress at once, and Georgia, in sudden alarm, turned to Nur Jahan.

"You are our friend, Nur Jahan? If you knew of any plot against the Mission, you would warn me?"

"I would risk my life and all that I have to warn thee in such a

case, O doctor-lady," replied Nur Jahan earnestly; "but what I fear is a plot of which I should know nothing."

With these ominous words ringing in her ears, Georgia entered the litter, and returned to the Mission in a somewhat perturbed state of mind. It seemed, however, that there was nothing going on that need excite her alarm. The Grand Vizier and his attendants had just brought the treaty to be ratified, and Georgia caught a glimpse of the assemblage as she passed through into the inner courtyard with Rahah. Had she guessed what was about to happen in the Durbar-hall, nothing would have induced her to leave the outer court.

On the table before Sir Dugald lay the treaty, written out with the greatest care and delicacy on a huge sheet of parchment, and displaying the most wonderful flourishes and other decorations at the beginning of every clause. At the other side of the table stood Fath-ud-Din, his attendants crowding behind him and peering eagerly over his shoulder to watch Sir Dugald. He had taken the pen from the hand of Fitz, and was glancing down the parchment for the exact place at which he was to affix his signature. To all appearance the treaty was that which had been read over to him the day before, and yet some suspicion entered his mind, prompted by his instinctive caution. He would not trust to his own slight knowledge of the Ethiopian language, but called Kustendjian forward.

"Be so good as to summarise that for me," he said, laying his finger on the clause which concerned the appointment of a British Resident, with jurisdiction over British subjects in Ethiopia, to take up his abode at Iskandarbagh.

The Armenian's eyes grew wide as he advanced and scanned the passage pointed out by Sir Dugald. "The Resident is to have no power to decide any cause in dispute between a British subject and an Ethiopian, nor between two British subjects when the question concerns property or other interests situated in Ethiopia, your Excellency," he said, in a low voice.

"And that," said Sir Dugald, indicating the clause by which British goods, with the exception of munitions of war and ardent spirits, were to be allowed entrance into Ethiopia upon payment of duties not exceeding a certain percentage of the value, which were to be imposed by the King and approved by England.

"The minimum duty is to be a hundred per cent. *ad valorem*, and there is no proviso as to the approval of her Majesty's Government, your Excellency. Every one of the clauses has had additions or omissions made in it, which render it absolutely useless for all practical purposes."

"Thank you, Mr. Kustendjian." Sir Dugald laid down the pen deliberately, and took up the treaty. The Ethiopians present had watched his actions with eager interest, but could read nothing in his face. Now, however, he seemed to their guilty consciences to rise and tower above them (under normal circumstances he was under

middle height), as he tore the tough parchment across and across, and flung the fragments over the table to Fath-ud-Din.

"Take those to your master," he said; "and be thankful that I don't call the servants to drive you out of the courtyard as they drove your hired ruffians last week. The Mission leaves Kubbet-ul-Haj to-day."

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT AND CAGED.

WHEN the Grand Vizier and his companions had been conducted to the door by the servants, and the gates had closed behind them, Sir Dugald turned from the table at which he had been standing motionless, and addressed Dick. The work of months had been overthrown, and the success by which he had hoped to put the crowning touch to his official career rendered impossible of attainment; but his first thought was to vindicate the outraged dignity of his country, insulted in his person.

"When you made your inspection of the stables this morning, Major North, were the animals all in?"

"Yes, sir; this is my weekly inspection, and the camels which had been out at pasture were brought in by their drivers to be passed. They all looked very fit; but we have not much forage for them in store."

"We must chance that. I should be glad if you would have our riding horses, together with a sufficient number of camels to carry the tents and their furniture, brought round here two hours before sunset. It would be impossible to travel far to-day, but if we are outside the city the required moral effect will be produced. I shall leave you and Anstruther behind to bring on the stores and the heavy luggage. We will travel by slow stages until you come up with us, and then we must make forced marches, and get out of the country as fast as possible, for we shall have no escort this time."

For the first time in his life Dick hesitated to obey an order.

"But the ladies, sir," he suggested. "Is it safe?"

"Is it safe for them here? The sooner we have them out of the city, the safer they will be," and Dick went to do his errand at the various stables in which the baggage-animals of the Mission were quartered.

To say that the sudden order to pack up and be ready to start on the homeward journey that very afternoon was startling to the ladies would be to mince matters, for it came upon them like a thunder-clap, but Lady Haigh was an old traveller, whom no vicissitudes could disturb for long, and Georgia was a soldier's daughter, and

they were both resolved that the honour of England should not be dragged in the dust on their account by the delay of a moment after the appointed hour of starting. Accordingly, they set to work immediately to take down and wrap up and pack away all the possessions with which they had made the house homelike during their tenancy of it, and were in the act of packing their dresses (which, as every lady will know, always occupy the topmost place in a box), when Dick made his appearance on the terrace. Georgia, who was standing at the table pulling out the sleeves of a favourite silk blouse, which she had just rescued from the ruthless hands of Rahah, looked at him in surprise, for his face was grave and set.

"Please don't say that you want us to start at once," she said cheerfully. "Lady Haigh and I are willing to make any sacrifice in reason for our country, but we had rather not leave our best dresses behind."

"It won't be necessary," returned Dick, trying, but with poor success, to speak in the same tone. "We shall not leave to-day, after all."

"Not leave to-day!" cried Lady Haigh, coming out on the terrace, and folding up a skirt at the same time. "Then when do we start?"

"Not just yet, I fear. The fact is, the King is trying on a little joke with us. He has fetched away all our horses and camels, and we can't get them back."

"But when did he do it? and where are they gone?" asked Lady Haigh in hot indignation.

"He must have done it immediately after I had come away from the stables after picking out the beasts for your start this evening. Where they are gone, I don't know, but we can't hire any others, and we can't very well walk, and therefore I suppose we must stay here."

"But it is such a bad precedent, to let him get the better of us like this!" cried Lady Haigh. "It is such absolute stealing, too. Are the servants gone as well as the animals?"

"Yes, they have all been marched off to fresh quarters somewhere. That thins our forces sadly."

"So it does," Lady Haigh assented gravely. "But never mind; if the King won't let us leave the city, we will make ourselves happy where we are."

"And perhaps," suggested Georgia, "it is merely that the King is sorry about the treaty, and wants to prevent Sir Dugald's leaving Kubbet-ul-Haj in anger. He may mean to resume the negotiations to-morrow."

"He may," agreed Dick, but his face was not hopeful as he returned across the courtyard, while the ladies took the things out of the boxes they had just packed. Still, the next morning seemed to confirm Georgia's cheerful augury, for an Embassy came from the King

to Sir Dugald, headed, not by the Grand Vizier (possibly he felt a slight doubt as to the nature of the reception he was likely to meet with), but by the official who had superintended the establishment of the Mission in its present quarters. In the message which he brought, Sir Dugald was entreated to overlook the incident of the day before, which had been devised by the King merely as a test of his shrewdness, and was in no way a serious attempt to induce him to sign a false treaty. If he would only come to the Palace to-day, the original treaty should be ready for his signature, and the King would affix his seal to it in his presence. At first Sir Dugald returned an absolute refusal to this invitation, but the messenger reappeared with it twice, adding such solemn and earnest assurances of its genuine character, that he consented to talk the matter over with his staff. Lady Haigh and Georgia invited themselves to assist at the discussion, and the first thing that opened Georgia's eyes to the gravity of the situation was the fact that Sir Dugald made no protest against the irregularity of this proceeding.

"You won't go, Dugald?" said Lady Haigh anxiously. "It may be only a trap. Remember Macnaghten."

"Couldn't you manage to suggest any more cheerful reminiscence?" asked Sir Dugald.

"You really mean to go, sir?" asked Dick.

"I think so. After all, what happened yesterday may have been only a trick, as this man says, though I don't think the King would have hesitated to profit by it if I had signed the false treaty. At any rate, so long as there is a chance of our coming off victorious, we ought not to let it slip. This treaty is of immense importance, for it brings Ethiopia within our sphere of influence, and when once it is concluded, we can snap our fingers at Scythia and Neustria. You see as well as I do that if we withdraw now and negotiations are resumed later, Scythia will have had time to slip in and conclude her treaty. I allow that we have a very slender chance of success, but if it depends on me I will not lose it. Still, I don't wish to take you into danger against your will, gentlemen. Your lives are at stake as much as mine, and if you think it advisable not to go to the Palace, I will dispense with your attendance on this occasion.

"We will go wherever you go, Sir Dugald," said Dick.

"Wherever you go," echoed the rest.

"But I can't take all of you," said Sir Dugald. "Two of you must stay here and look after the ladies. I don't like dividing our force, but it would be poor strategy to let them be seized as hostages while we were away. You see what I mean, Elma? I will leave you North and the doctor as a garrison, and you and the servants must put yourselves under their orders and help to defend the place if it is attacked."

"No, Dugald," returned Lady Haigh resolutely, regardless of the fact that she was indulging in open mutiny, "unless Major North

goes with you, you shall not go to the Palace at all. Dr. Headlam and we can defend ourselves quite well behind stone walls; but it would be madness for you to trust yourself outside without a man with you that knew anything about fighting. Only take Major North, and I am content."

For peace' sake, Sir Dugald accepted this view of the case, and a little later the party set out with the ambassador, who had brought with him several horses from the King's stables, huge fat animals, most of them a peculiar pinkish-white in colour, with highly arched necks and flowing manes and tails decorated with ribbons and sham jewellery. They were provided with high native saddles and elaborate saddle-cloths, and the ambassador explained that they were intended as gifts to Sir Dugald and to his staff. Asked what had become of the animals belonging to the Mission, he confessed ingenuously that the King had had them removed in order to frustrate Sir Dugald's design of leaving the city, but that they would be returned as soon as ever the treaty was signed, so that the Envoy and his young men might depart in peace.

Arrived at the Palace, the members of the Mission were conducted to the usual hall of audience. It was not without some unpleasant sensations that they heard the gates of the courtyard close behind them, and Dick involuntarily loosened his sword in the scabbard, and noticed that Stratford and Fitz were feeling whether their revolvers were safe. Sir Dugald alone showed no signs of disturbance, even when on reaching the hall he was requested to go into the King's presence-chamber by himself, the rest remaining in the outer room. Before he could answer, his staff pressed around him, regardless of etiquette.

"Don't go, sir," said Dick. "It's a trap."

"They mean mischief, Sir Dugald," said Stratford. "The King has never asked to see you alone before."

"Let us put a pistol to this fellow's head, sir, and keep him as a hostage until we are safely back at the Mission," suggested Fitz, looking daggers at the smiling official, who was bowing and spreading out his hands in token of the welcome which awaited Sir Dugald in the King's presence.

"Nonsense!" said Sir Dugald irritably, motioning Stratford aside. "You mean well, gentlemen; but we can't make fools of ourselves in this way. Look there. You see that there's nothing but a curtain between the two rooms, and you would hear the slightest scuffle or cry for help. I give you free leave to interfere if you do hear anything of the kind, but pray keep cool."

He went on, following the official, and passed under the heavy curtain which covered the doorway of the inner room. Some minutes of painful suspense ensued, while the three Englishmen and Kustendjian strained their ears to hear what was going on within. Suddenly there came a sound as of the ringing of metal on a marble

floor, and Dick sprang to the doorway with a bound, followed by the rest, and tore aside the curtain. He never quite knew what he had expected to see, but it was certainly not the sight which met his eyes. The King was sitting on his raised divan, with Fath-ud-Din standing beside him. Before them there lay on a gorgeous Persian carpet a great pile of bags of money, one of which had been kicked across the room. It had burst open, and the clash of the escaping silver was the sound which the listeners had heard. They had no time to meditate further on the situation, for Sir Dugald, his face white with anger, was coming towards them, actually turning his back on the King, and as he reached the doorway he looked round over his shoulder and spoke.

"Your Majesty understands that under no circumstances will I consent to enter the Palace again. Any communication you may wish to make to me can pass through my secretary."

"But which is he?" inquired Fath-ud-Din smoothly in Arabic, the language in which Sir Dugald had spoken. "Is he the mighty man of whose deeds the hillmen sing, and with whose name the women of Khemistan terrify their children?"

Sir Dugald silently indicated Stratford, and the Vizier looked at him, and grunted softly to himself. But the King sat up suddenly (he had been leaning forward with his chin on his hand, listening to what passed), and said:

"Ye cannot leave this place without camels, and camels ye shall not have until the treaty is signed."

"No; but we can wait here until a British force comes to escort us away," said Sir Dugald, and marched down the hall. His staff followed him, not without an uneasy feeling that they might be attacked from behind. Indeed, Kustendjian confessed afterwards that he had never felt quite so much frightened in his life as when Fitz gave him a poke in the ribs.

"What was it that they really did, sir?" asked Dick, when they were riding back to the Mission.

"They tried bribery and corruption, North—offered me the heap of money you saw on the floor if I would sign that precious treaty of theirs and make no bones about it. I have had experiences of the kind before, in out-of-the-way places, where the people knew little of British rule, but this is quite the biggest thing of its sort that has ever been tried with me. I don't fancy they will attempt it again."

"Was it the treaty you tore up yesterday?"

"Exactly the same. I knew it this time without Kustendjian's help. Well, this is the last time we shall be tricked into going to the Palace on such an errand."

But it was evident in the morning that the Ethiopian authorities had not given up hope, for a second deputation appeared, headed by an official even higher in rank than the preceding one, and entreated

Sir Dugald to return to the Palace once again. This time the King had tried his loyalty, which had stood the test, and now, finding that he could neither be deceived nor corrupted, he would send with him an autograph letter to her Majesty, advising her to promote the Envoy above all her servants, since neither threats nor bribes nor any devices could move him. Sir Dugald smiled grimly when he heard the message, which was brought him by Stratford, who had interviewed the embassy.

"Praise from such a quarter is praise indeed," he remarked; "but you may tell them, Mr. Stratford, that this fish will not bite."

Again the deputation sent in earnest entreaties for merely a sight of Sir Dugald's face, declaring that they dared not return to the King without having seen him, and on being dismissed they came back twice over, each time becoming more urgent in their request. Let Sir Dugald only come to the Palace once more, and sign the treaty in the King's presence, and all would be well. But Sir Dugald was not to be moved. The utmost concession that he would make in answer to the prayers of the messengers was to consent to sign the original treaty if it were brought to him at the Mission already bearing the seals of the King and Fath-ud-din, or else to allow Stratford to take to the Palace the copy made by Kustendjian and obtain the required signatures to it, after which Sir Dugald would affix his. Further than this he would not go, and the deputation retired disappointed once more.

No deputation appeared the next day, but the members of the Mission were not allowed to imagine themselves forgotten. Before the hour at which the gate was usually opened in the morning, a strong guard of soldiers took post before it, and signified that they would permit no one either to enter or leave the premises. Under these circumstances, Sir Dugald, while entrusting to the officer in command of the troops a formal protest to be delivered to the King, considered it advisable to keep the gate shut, although the soldiers showed no disposition to attempt to force an entrance. The object of their presence, which appeared at first as a somewhat purposeless insult, was soon discovered, for when the country-people came as usual with their baskets of eggs and vegetables for sale, intending to set up their market in the street, as they had done since the day of the riot, they were turned back and not allowed to approach the gate. In the same way the cooks, who made an attempt to get out as far as the town market to do their catering, were refused leave to pass, and returned disconsolately into the courtyard. It was evident that an endeavour was to be made to starve the Mission into surrender, and Sir Dugald ordered an examination of the stores to be instituted. The result was not reassuring. It had never been intended that the expedition should carry all its supplies with it, and therefore, although there was still a considerable quantity of tinned provisions and other articles of luxury, there was a great deficiency of corn and flour, and

of course an absolute lack of fresh meat and vegetables. It was obviously necessary to put the whole party upon fixed rations at once, but this measure would be of little avail if the blockade outside were kept up strictly.

With night however, a gleam of comfort arrived in the shape of Jahan Beg, who was discovered by Fitz lurking in the lane behind the house, and was drawn up to the window by a rope. He had heard of the King's last measure of offence, and was anxious to know how it affected his friends. Sir Dugald's refusal to go to the Palace he approved heartily, saying that any yielding now would be accepted as a sign of fear and weakness, leaving out of sight the extreme probability that the opportunity would be seized of making an attempt on his life. At the same time, the Amir confessed that he saw no way out of the situation which would combine honour and safety. Fath-ud-Din was paramount in the council, and while he was in power no one else could get a hearing. Rustam Khan was in fear of his life, and had everything ready for immediate flight at a moment's notice should his spies inform him that it was expedient. The Scythian envoy was once more to the front, although no definite arrangement had as yet been concluded with him. It seemed to be Fath-ud-Din's policy to play off one nation against the other, doing his best to secure concessions from each, while giving as little as possible in the way of equivalent to either.

"If you can get any treaty that in the slightest degree approaches your demands, sign it and go," said Jahan Beg. "And if you can't get your treaty, go in any case, if you can."

"I was thinking of sending a man off to Fort Rahmat-Ullah to describe our plight, and ask for orders and help," said Sir Dugald, "but the difficulty is that they will allow no one to pass. One does not care to court a rebuff by demanding facilities for the passage of a courier taking important despatches to Khemistan and finding them refused, and even if we could smuggle him out behind in any way, there would be such a very slender chance of his passing the city gates, much less of reaching the frontier."

"I will do what I can to help a messenger off if you are obliged to run the blockade," said Jahan Beg, "but as you say, there is a very slight chance of success. Why not send a message by that man Hicks, who has been talking for weeks of returning to Khemistan immediately?"

"Because he only meant to return when our business was over, and now that things have become more exciting, he is bound to be in at the death," said Sir Dugald. "He must wait here and write our obituary notices, you see."

"Well, I advise you to wait a day or two, in case anything occurs to alter the situation. The Scythian agent may turn rusty, if it dawns upon him that he is being played with, and then your chance will come."

"The worst of it is that our chances are limited by our supplies," said Sir Dugald. "We have not the beasts and the camel-men to consider now, certainly, but it is no joke providing simply for ourselves and the servants here. Both Fath-ud-Din and the Scythian envoy have the whip-hand of us in that respect."

"Yes," put in Georgia, for the conversation was taking place on the terrace, "it would not comfort us much even to get the treaty signed when we were reduced to a ration of three tinred peas and a square inch of chocolate each a day."

"Don't be afraid, Miss Keeling," said Stratford. "I think I can assure you that we men will each add one pea and an appreciable fraction of the chocolate to your ration and Lady Haigh's."

"And we shall hand it back to you, remarking gracefully that you need it more than we do," said Georgia.

"By-the-bye," said Jahan Beg, "I think I can help you about provisions a little. I can get a small supply of corn through the lanes at the back without attracting the notice of the soldiers, and you can draw up the sacks through the window. I will bring you a donkey-load to-morrow night, and another the next night if all is well."

In spite of the watch kept on the house, Jahan Beg was as good as his word, and succeeded in supplying the beleaguered garrison, in the course of the next three nights, with enough corn to relieve them from any present fear of starvation. In other respects, however, the situation showed no improvement. Once more a deputation from the Palace arrived to propose terms, and departed as before without seeing Sir Dugald. But this time the official who headed it declared as he departed that no more messages of conciliation would be sent by the King. After this, if the British Mission desired to abandon its attitude of suspicion, and meet the Ethiopian Government on a footing of mutual confidence, it must make the first move. The soldiers at the gateway had been ordered to allow Sir Dugald to pass at any hour of the day or night, either with or without his staff, and to escort him to the Palace with due honour. But no advantage was taken of this intimation, and inside the Mission councils were held daily as to the measures to be adopted in case the state of affairs should remain unchanged. Sir Dugald had decided to send a messenger to Fort Rahmat-Ullah asking for instructions, and Jahan Beg had chosen one of his servants, a man who was devoted to him and who knew the country well, for the dangerous errand. As soon as arrangements had been made for a supply of horses along the route to be traversed, this man was to come to the Mission to receive Sir Dugald's despatches, which were to be sewn up in his clothes, and the imprisoned residents began to regard the state of affairs with somewhat greater equanimity, since the burden of decision in the dilemma in which they found themselves would be laid upon other shoulders than their own.

On the fourth day of the blockade, however, an unexpected change

occurred. Once more an embassy appeared, but this time it was a private one. It consisted of the two sons of Fath-ud-Din, who had brought Mr. Hicks to introduce them and to guarantee their good faith, and a number of attendants, who bore gifts of fruit and vegetables. The object of their errand was soon imparted. Fath-ud-Din had been seized with a mysterious illness, the nature of which was unknown to the Ethiopian physicians and baffled all their remedies, and he had sent to entreat Dr. Headlam, to whose skill all his patients in the city bore eloquent testimony, to come and prescribe for him. Sir Dugald and his staff looked at one another doubtfully when they heard the message.

"It looks remarkably like a trap," said Sir Dugald.

"Still, Hicks would scarcely lend himself to such a thing," said the doctor.

"Let us have him in," said Sir Dugald, and Mr. Hicks was invited in, leaving his young friends in the verandah.

"If you ask me, I think the old man is real sick," he said, in reply to their questions. "I heard his groans when I called at his house just now, and they were awful. I guess the old sinner is nailed this time, any way."

"But it is so exactly what one might look for in a plot to secure one of us as a hostage for the signing of the treaty," said Dick.

"Well, two can play at that game," said the doctor, who was eager to go. "I suppose I must have young Fath-ud-din with me to do the honours of the house, but do you keep the boy here, and don't let him go until you have me safely back. That ought to checkmate any intended move of theirs."

"Doctor, there's something like grit in you!" cried Mr. Hicks warmly. "What with your professional enthusiasm, and your level-headedness, you deserve to be immortalised. And your name shall be handed down in the pages of history, or I will cut my connection with the *Crier* from that day."

"Thanks," said the doctor. "Now suppose you call in the young gentlemen and explain the state of affairs. I don't want to get to the house and find the poor old villain beyond my skill."

The Vizier's eldest son understood the matter at once, and was perfectly willing that his young brother should remain at the Mission as a hostage for Dr. Headlam's safe return. The boy was therefore delivered over to Sir Dugald and taken into the inner court, and the doctor left the house with Mr. Hicks and young Fath-ud-Din.

"Make the most of your opportunities, doctor," Stratford called after him as he departed. "Have the medicine ready, and refuse to give it him except as the price of the signing of our treaty."

Dr. Headlam went off laughing, and the evening passed quietly at the Mission. About eleven o'clock the doctor returned, escorted by young Fath-ud-Din, who received his brother back, and departed with profuse expressions of gratitude.

"What sort of time have you had with the boy?" asked the doctor of Stratford and Dick, who were accompanying him across the court on his way to his own quarters.

"Oh, not bad, under the circumstances," returned Dick. "We set Anstruther down to teach him halma by signs, and Miss Keeling gave us a little music—that is to say, she did her best to sing to the strains of Kustendjian's concertina. I never heard anyone play so vilely as that fellow in all my life, but the boy seemed impressed. Afterwards we sat in a ring and tried to talk, with Kustendjian to interpret, and all got most fearfully sleepy. But how did you get on?"

"Well, I don't quite know," replied the doctor, somewhat reluctantly. "I have an uncomfortable kind of feeling, and yet I can't be sure that it is justified. But I will tell you about the evening, and then you can judge for yourselves whether the matter is of any importance."

"Oh, go on!" said Dick and Stratford together. "Don't keep us on the rack."

"Well, as soon as I got to the house I was taken to see old Fath-ud-Din. It's pretty clear to me that he has a tolerably severe attack of influenza, but he thought he was dying—or at any rate, he groaned as if he did. I prescribed the usual remedies, and gave various directions as to things which I thought might relieve him. He sent the servants out of the room to get hot flannels and the other things I had ordered, and then turned to me. I was pouring out the medicine, which I had fortunately been able to make up from the drugs I had brought with me, and I went to give it to him. As I held the glass to his lips, he fixed me with his eye and said in Arabic, 'A doctor has many opportunities.' It was such a truism that I merely agreed, and he went on, 'He holds in his hand the life of the man to whose help he is called.' I thought he was afraid that I might be trying to poison him, and I said, 'If your Excellency doubts me, I will sip the medicine myself first.' At that he grinned in what he seemed to consider as a friendly and ingratiating manner, and said, 'You mistake me. I trust you. So also does the Queen of England's Envoy trust you, and our lord the King trusts his physician.' I didn't quite see the relevance of the remark, so I cut matters short by requesting him to take his medicine. He sat up and balanced the glass in his hand, and said, looking at me over the edge of it: 'Doubtless you are acquainted with poisons which could be administered in a little draught like this, and do their work without causing suspicion?' I didn't at all like the turn the conversation was taking, but I told him shortly that I did know of such poisons, and he said at once, 'There are great fortunes to be made by men who possess such knowledge as that, and who are willing to use it.' I was partly flustered and partly angry, for I could not make out whether he was still harping on the idea of my poisoning him, or hinting at bribing me to murder Sir Dugald or perhaps the King, and I said very

emphatically, 'I don't understand your Excellency, and I must ask you to remember that I have no wish whatever to do so.' That was something of a cram, I'm afraid, but I was too much flurried to pick my phrases, and I gave him the medicine without another word. Then the servants came back, and I saw them make him comfortable, and then Hicks and I had dinner, or supper, or whatever you might call it, with young Fath-ud-Din. Now, what do you think of it?"

"It looks fishy," said Stratford. "If you ask me I think we must look after the Chief."

"Just so," said Dr. Headlam, "but without frightening the ladies. I will tell him the whole story to-morrow morning. They couldn't attempt anything particular to-night, and it's very late. Besides, I feel a bit seedy myself."

"I hope they haven't poisoned *you*," said Dick, pausing and looking at him.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. Why, Hicks and young Fath-ud-Din and I were all eating out of the same dish. If you had seen some of the messes of which politeness forced Hicks and me to partake, you would wonder that we are alive now. There was one concoction full of chillies, which has made me most consumedly thirsty."

"Come back and have something to drink," said Dick. "The servants are gone to roost, but I think we are capable of compounding you a peg between us."

"No, thanks; I am looking forward to a glass of my own effervescent mixture. My servants always have orders to leave the filter full for me. Well, we must be thinking of turning in, I suppose."

"Stay over here to-night," said Stratford, moved by a sudden impulse. "We can manage to put you up in Bachelors' Buildings, and it will be more convenient if you are really seedy. Besides, it is undoubtedly bad policy for one of us to sleep out in an isolated house at a time like this."

"My dear Stratford, I have a rifle and a revolver, and a whole armoury of surgical knives with which to defend my hearth and home. Any midnight marauder who came to pay me a visit would find that he had undertaken a tough job. Moreover, my servants are good fellows, and they are armed after a fashion. And then I have the famous collection, with the reputation Anstruther has conferred upon it, to protect me. Good-night: I am really too thirsty to wait talking any longer."

They unbarred the gate and let him out, watched him cross the street and knock at his own door, and saw him admitted. Then, after going the round of the sentries, they retired to their own quarters, where they spent some time in conversation. Before turning in, they went out to the gate once more, impelled by a common anxiety for which they made no attempt to account to one another, and looked across at the doctor's house, but the door was shut and all was quiet there.

(To be continued.)

A VISION OF SPRING.

THE first fresh glory clothed the hill and valley—
 The year was new—
 I met Spring walking in a leafy alley,
 And thought of you.
 Nay, surely you were somewhere masquerading
 In fair disguise;
 Her wild blue hyacinths had just the shading
 Of your blue eyes.

 She vanished, leaving in a primrose border
 Her starry track;
 I hurried swiftly after her in order
 To call her back.
 Down in a shady copse I saw a glimmer—
 She was not there;
 It might have been a sunbeam or the shimmer
 Of your bright hair.

 Beneath the branches of the orchard yonder
 I heard her pass—
 Or was it your light foot that pressed, I wonder,
 The dew-drenched grass?
 For lo! I found between the green blades showing,
 As gem deep set,
 Or gladness in a barren life up-growing,
 A violet!

 Yet still she did elude, still did I follow;
 And each soft grace
 Of flowery meadow or of wooded hollow
 Recall'd your face;
 While all the air with laughter was a-quiver,
 That mock'd my choice—
 It may have been the ripple of the river,
 Or else your voice.

 At last I paused amid the singing thrushes,
 And spoke your name;
 The west wind caught it up and told the rushes—
 And then you came.
 Robed in the radiance of your youth I saw you—
 Words seem'd too weak—
 And for the very might of love I bore you
 I dared not speak.

 Full in the sun, with apple-blossoms laden,
 You smiling stood;
 I almost fear'd you some enchanted maiden,
 For earth too good.
 And then I knew why I had wander'd lonely—
 I learnt this thing—
 It was your presence, love, I wanted only,
 To find my Spring!

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

THE GOLDEN AGE.

"DON'T you think," wrote Hawthorne to Longfellow from England in the May of 1855, Longfellow being then about forty-eight, and Hawthorne himself over fifty, "that the autumn may be the golden age both of the intellect and the imagination? You certainly grow richer and deeper at every step of your advance in life. I shall be glad to think that I too may improve—that, for instance, there may be something ruddier, warmer, and more genial in my later fruitage."

Whether Hawthorne's aspiration was fulfilled or not, it is pleasant to find him appreciating the mellow qualities of his friend.

It was at the age of forty-five that Charles Lamb, after all he had gone through, wished he could remain stationary, with all he loved about him, to grow neither older nor younger through all eternity. To him, more truly, perhaps, than to their author, Landor's exquisite lines might have applied:—

"How many voices gaily sing,
'O happy morn, O happy spring
Of life!' Meanwhile there comes o'er me
A softer voice from memory,
And says, 'If loves and hopes have flown
With years, think too what griefs are gone!'"

Though in Lamb's case love could never be said to have flown, loves present and loves withdrawn being united in his life in one inseparable bond.

And many others with whom, as with Elia, the spirits grow grey before the hairs, find a certain relief, a retreat from life's fever and bustle, from their own wayward longings, and from others' expectations of them, in the serener atmosphere of middle life. What if the air of noon or of afternoon be drowsier than that of morn, when they were "quick from head to foot." They prefer to watch, with sympathetic eye, the children sport upon the shore than to take active part in their gambols, to dwell securely in the old accustomed ways of love rather than to sigh and languish with those at its mysterious portals. Their griefs time, perhaps, will have converted into dearer hopes than any that are fled; their pleasures, so far from constituting sorrow's crown of sorrow, will occasionally take a delight the more in the remembrance, wearing they too the semblance of hope rather than of regret. And there is a certain piquant charm in noting, as from a back-seat, the passing humours, the by-play of life's drama while, as often as not, the essential freshness and romance of youth, sometimes even more than its strength, remains.

For the joke of it is one does not feel old; scarcely older often than

in youth's heyday ; so that, the mask of lines, of hollows that are not dimples, and of grey hairs notwithstanding, one has sometimes to remind oneself (like the octogenarian Mrs. Gilbert, Ann Taylor that was) not only that one is aging, but positively even sometimes that one is grown-up. As we arrive into our decades one by one we find it is just we ourselves, our five-year-old, our twelve-year-old, our twenty-year-old selves, that have arrived there, and not some other, strange, *middle-aged* person such as we conceived of in our pert young teens.

"Youth is not rich in time," says the author of the 'Night Thoughts' (whose name of Young is somewhat oddly in contrast with its possessor's quality)—"Part with it as with money—sparingly."

But would youth be youth if it did so? There is that scattereth and yet increaseth with other things than pelf. To the miser of his youth its fleeting essence will evaporate, while perhaps to the careless spendthrift of it the wayward charm will still persist in clinging. With the age of some people years have simply nothing to do. They pass over them as over children on their enchanted shore, who never think of Time, even while they listen to the murmurings of Eternity through the lips of some sea-shell.

Not only do parents revive their youth in their young ones, but children who have grown old in the bonds of love that bound them from their birth are apt to retain something of the child through life. Miss Edgeworth, at seventy-two, surprised at her own lightness of heart and limb, quaintly wondered if perhaps she would attain to years of discretion at eighty. The writer has heard the oldest woman it has ever been her lot to know, who wanted but three years of her century, say in reverential tenderness of a lady young enough to be her granddaughter: "Why, she's very old! She's a mother—and a grandmother!" as if the idea of age in connection with herself were one she had never yet been quite able to take in. But in mothers and grandmothers no less, in fathers and in grandfathers, this indestructible quality of youth remains. A woman "up in years," as the saying is, may be like one of her own children in childishness, and not the eldest of them either. Like a child in purity and innocence, yet with the sacredness of maternity upon her, sits many a mother amidst her grown-up sons and daughters, primed with all the hideous modern jargon of "heredity," "degeneration," and the rest of it, which they are fain to keep in the background in her presence. What indeed is second childhood, to use an exquisite expression which coarse lips have done their best to defile, but the dropping away of the accidental acquirements of life, leaving its added loves and wisdom intact?

"The true wisdom," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, "is to be always seasonable, and to change with a good grace in changing circumstances." But for himself, as it turned out, he could not change, being of those who perhaps do not take themselves seriously

enough to lapse into middle age. "A childless, blighted youth" he called himself, in a letter written only a few hours before his death to Mr. Edmund Gosse, and seemed half to deplore his incapacity for changing with the years. That incapacity, however, is commoner than he seemed to think. There are, of course, some what Stevenson would have called "severe cases of middle-age" to be met with. But, to a greater degree than we acknowledge, though "youth's a stuff will not endure," its wear and tear is often only in the outward fabric of it. Time's encroachments on our corporeal frame, as on some valued article of dress, is a matter of interest to us, certainly, but of no vital consequence and by no means affecting our personality. One cannot help, unfortunately, having on a worn body, any more than one can help, under certain circumstances, having on a shabby cloak. It is perhaps more awkward in the one case than in the other, but it is still *we* that are in it. The house of life may fall in ruins about our ears, but the same soul looks out through the wreck as dwelt there when the pillars were firm and upright, and the walls had taken on no stain of wind and weather.

Time, indeed, is no respecter of bodies. But he is of souls. We sometimes see a middle-aged, or even aged soul looking pompously out of a baby face, while occasionally the very spirit of youth will glance forth on us from amidst grey hairs and wrinkles.

Emerson, with more humour than he is usually credited with, refers to these deceptive masks of age. "Whilst we yet call ourselves young," he says, "and our mates are yet youths with even boyish remains, one good fellow in the set prematurely sports a grey or a bald head, which does not impose on us . . . but does deceive his juniors and the public, who presently distinguish him with a most amusing respect; and this lets us into the secret," he slyly adds, "that the venerable forms that so awed our childhood were just such impostors." Which genial sentiment Oliver Wendell Holmes, who would not allow himself to be done out of a good thing merely because some one else had been beforehand with him in the uttering of it, appropriated to his own use in his quaint verses, "What we all think"—

"That age was older once than now,
In spite of locks untimely shed,
Or silvered on the youthful brow."

And in sudden access of surprise he exclaims,

"How young the grandpapas have grown!"

When the Prince of Wales was lately greeted in the Principality by the venerable epithet of "Grandpapa Wales," the youthful-hearted heir, pleasantly conscious, we must suppose, of some incongruity in the phrase, went, with his companion, the Duke of Devonshire, as some spectator of the scene recorded, into uncontrollable fits of laughter, the two rolling about like schoolboys in their mirth. And, to draw

another illustration from royal rank (in which rank, one might suppose, the burden of years, weighted by a crown, would be peculiarly heavy): when the Austrian Emperor on his fiftieth birthday bade, as he is said to have done, "Good-bye to youth," he must have felt that youth was with him still to take leave of. In which case the comrade of half a century would scarcely have deserted him at a moment's notice. We are not bound to relinquish our youth at the bidding of a year—or twenty years, nor can we, except perhaps in some vital crisis, cast youth from us, as Charles XII. of Sweden cast the cup from which he had drained his last draught of the wine that had disgraced him.

"The sixties have all the twenties and forties in them," the old Indian brave, quoted by Emerson, remarked. Meanwhile we have outgrown the distemper of youth. Its perilous matter has been got rid of, with more or less advantage to one's peace. We have grown accustomed to ourselves and others, to the world and its little ways (such a pleasant world it is if one only takes it rightly), and can face its changes and chances with more philosophy than when we were new to them. For, whatever people may say, it is at a very early age that we are introduced to care, and the older we grow the cleverer we become at dodging him.

Middle age, moreover, is free to indulge its humours. To youth, the slightest eccentricity is denied. It must be continually on its good behaviour. What in a "whimsical old fellow," or in a woman who has established a reputation for originality would be set down as a pleasing exhibition of character, will be sneered at or else frowned upon in the young as ridiculous impertinence and ill-breeding. Something of the limitations of childhood, without its allowances, attach to them, and while their experience and judgment are still almost all to come, more is required of them in the way of self-denial and forbearance than perhaps at any other period.

Youth itself, to a great extent, is thrown away upon the young. To older eyes the beauty and brightness of spring show fairer in that they can also perceive the humour and the pathos of it. One has even pitied children and other fair young things to think that they are never outside their own sweetness to enjoy it. It is better to admire a rose than to be a rose. Does poetry lose its charm with years? Does love? Nay, rather, as life goes on revealing itself, one's powers of appreciation and of sympathy develop. The better able are we to enjoy the glory and loveliness of nature. Art and literature voluntarily unfold to us charms that were hidden from the searching glance of youth. The fancy of many, besides Crabbe, is quickened by the first flight of snow. Lowell, at fifty-four, instead of finding himself, as he had apprehended, "fairly stalled in the slough of middle-age," was pleased to note, on the contrary, that his dreams had recovered their tone, and were getting as fanciful, he says, "as they used to be before I was twenty-five." The world opens out to

us, the world of spirit and of the affections. In the clear daylight one can see further than through the haze of morn. We obtain glimpses into realms more satisfying than our young imagination dreamed of.

The delights of liberty become ours, the freedom to ride, walk, read, sleep, etc., "at our own ease, and pleasing a man's [or woman's] self, none other to displease." With Mr. Andrew Lang, who has sung, in cheery, whistling mood, the Ballade of Middle Age, we find that "life's more amusing than we thought." We have not grown old, but only more experienced and discriminating, and (wondrous paradox) at the same time more humble and more easily pleased. Our hearts are actually younger "'neath wrinkled rind" than they were through the long, long days, under the spell of the long, long thoughts of youth. How unmitigatedly old does forty seem to twenty, or fifty to thirty. But when we have arrived at that once hypothetical period of life (hypothetical so far as we ourselves were concerned), the strangeness as well as the venerableness have all gone from it. Or, to be more correct, the strangeness of it strikes us as of something with which we have only accidentally been brought into contact. As Lowell wrote of himself at a period far beyond that of middle life, "It is very droll to be seventy. Don't scold me for it. I'll never do it again"—taking it apparently for some huge, rather awkward joke that had been forced upon him, and into which he tried hard to enter, "doing his best to be seventy," he once declared. Many of us, if we were to wake up and find ourselves twenty, the intervening years a dream, would feel quite at home with our age.

But the romance of middle life, on its own merit, has come to be taken into account again. There is still a spring in autumn. Nay, there are some who would say, as a contemporary poet did of the mother of George Herbert, in a poem gracefully entitled, "The Autumnal beauty,"

"Nor spring nor summer's beauty hath such grace
As I have seen in an autumnal face."

The faces one loves grow dearer for every mark of time upon them, such marks being but the outward token of those passing joys and sorrows, cares and consolations, that love and life are made of. Time is a wonderful artist, the greatest old master of them all, and, while he blurs out and defaces bloom and outline, sometimes puts in a touch, a look, one would not give up for all the smiles and sparkles that are gone. The attachment between Vittoria Colonna and her illustrious lover, Michel Angelo, is a no less glorious episode than the untried loves of Romeo and Juliet.

And there is this to be said for life's golden mean, that whereas one has the mortification of seeing youth, at least in its outward semblance, fade before one's eyes, ere hardly one has had the time to realise it, middle age may practically be made to last for ever. Some

people's Indian summer keeps lingering on till Christmas, when it is time to look forward to spring again. So tenacious of its life is youth. Upon each decade, as one enters it, fresh interest, new images of poetry gather. Forty takes the place that thirty used to take in our imagination, and fifty that of forty. And so, from our gradual approaches, the vision of age recedes, till it is lost amid the fair hill-tops of immortality, glowing violet in the sunset.

It is not always life's vernal days to which the greatest sum of vernal joys belong. Youth will sometimes prove the winter's morn to a long bright day of cheerfulness and content, so far as those attributes can belong at any period to our mortal state. Or rather,

"Our seasons have no fixed returns ;
Without our will they come and go."

Often on our autumn gleams and trembles an hour of vernal grace. Our spring, ever and anon, is chilled and darkened by the untimely touch of winter. Has it not often been remarked how in the year's prime we droop and languish, while with the fall of the leaf fresh vigour flows through our veins and we lift a hopefuller face to the darkening skies. There are as many rainbows in autumn as in spring.

Not many, one fancies, would deliberately choose to live over their youth again, for all their after glorification of it. The general opinion would rather tally with that of Lady Nairn.

"Would you be young again? So would not I ;
One glance to memory given, onward I'd hie."

When Wordsworth asked Southey if he would like to have his youth back—"No, William, no," came the emphatic response. In the "warm joyance of the summer sun," he had no hankering back to the east winds, the uncertain gleams of spring.

"I would not learn again
The wisdom by experience hardly taught."

And, in the very spirit of Charles Lamb, he goes on :—

"To me the present gives
All cause for full content.
The future? It is now the cheerful noon,
And on the sunny-smiling fields I gaze
With eyes alive to joy :
When the dark night descends,
My weary lids I willingly shall close,
Again to wake in light."

Yet middle age is the period from which people seem most to shrink :—

"Sweet is the infant's waking smile,
And sweet the old man's rest,
But middle age by no fond wile,
No soothing calm is blest."

Your pardon, Mr. Keble, but it is blest by both. In the case of parents, with the wiles of their little ones. Of those who are content

to be only sons and daughters, only brothers and sisters, with the companionship growing sweeter year by year, of those in whom their earliest loves were centred ; with whom for a period, while time seems to stand benignly still, they are in middle age together.

To the question, then, which is life's happiest period, one might answer : childhood is buoyant, but how defenceless and how exposed to grief ; youth is gay, but how unmanageable is everything in youth, from the hair to the temper ; age, if comforted and sheltered, is a time of peace, the most lovable as it is the most loving of periods. But alas, the heart of age is weak as childhood's own.

In middle life we have gained strength, or else philosophy, to meet the brunt of life, and yet not lost the elasticity of early years. We are in sympathy with both youth and age. At times the roseate light of sunrise seems to envelop us once more. Then again, the golden sunset, suggestive as much of hope as of regret, lures our look onward. We dream we are old already, that the light of farewells shines on our faces, brightening their care-worn outlines into something fairer than the grace of infancy.

Childhood is a valley, and age is a valley, and the hills on either side, for ascent or for descent, are steep and often perilous. But middle life is the broad level plain on the mountain summit where, like the mountaineer who has overcome the fatigues and dangers of the upward journey, one can afford to rest awhile, perhaps open a bottle of champagne and drink to the heights one has scaled. Or even when it is but the most unillustrious halting-place one has attained to and there be no effervescing draught to drain, one still may sit and rest in the sun's kindly beams. The peaks above and beyond waken no wild yearnings in one's heart as they did in youth. One is content to leave them unscaled. The old familiar voices of our friends suffice us for all happiness. The little wayside pleasures and distractions offer enough of life to those from whom the burden, the self-consciousness, the struggling desires of youth have fallen. It is

"The noon of life—those golden days,
When the mind ripens ere the form decays,"

of which Lord Hervey sang the praise to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

PAULINE W. ROOSE.

NURSE AND DOCTOR.

BY ANNA H. DRURY.

I.



THE great surgeon's holiday was nearly over. A little more than three weeks had been spent in Scotland, and at the urgent entreaty of his oldest friend, Colonel Tyrwhitt, he had stopped on his way home to spend three days with him in Midlandshire.

Three days, and no more. Those who knew Everard Luttrell understood what that meant. He was as decided in his holiday movements as in the treatment of his patients, sometimes

to their extreme dissatisfaction. For one thing, nobody could be certain when Everard Luttrell would take his holiday. It was no use calculating on its being the height of the season, when the great men are so overwhelmed with work that they have hardly time to live. Sometimes he went away in May, sometimes in June, sometimes when people were just settling down in town again for the winter. And it was no use pleading urgency, or hinting at unlimited remuneration. If the patient's need did not move him, no cheque would be able to prevail. As he once observed, "They would manage without me if I were dead and buried, and they must manage while I am away. My own case is the one I have to think of now."

Only a very few intimate friends—one, his trusted medical adviser—knew what there was in his own case to require exceptional care. An active, wiry man of fifty-three, he rarely had a day's illness; but he was liable to fits of dangerous depression, whose premonitory symptoms he had learned to know too well, and which, with all his

watchfulness, would sometimes take him by surprise. When ordinary measures would not suffice, he applied the one sure remedy, and gave himself leave of absence for a month. Sport of every kind was his delight, and the more out-of-door exercise he could obtain, the quicker, as a rule, came the convalescence. The amount of suffering he bore during the attack, while apparently absorbed in amusement, was known only to himself.

His Highland visit to a grateful patient's moor had been a success; and he had not been idle during the two days just passed at his friend Colonel Tyrwhitt's place, the Combe.

The September weather was perfect, and the visitor's eye and hand had been in excellent form. To his friend's wife and daughters—the eldest of the three girls was his godchild—he had been most agreeable, entering with interest into their pursuits, and charming them by his conversation; and all were of the same mind in wishing he would prolong his stay. But the Colonel forbade remonstrance. If Luttrell said he must go, go he would; and worrying him about it might prevent his ever coming again.

He had done his best, both for his visitor and his neighbours, giving up the third day to a "big shoot" on the estate of a brother squire, who was anxious to do honour to the occasion, and gathered a party on purpose. The sport had been good during the morning, and the distinguished guest sustained his reputation, not only with the birds before luncheon, but at the luncheon itself, which the ladies from Knighton Hall came to join. Never had the Colonel, who watched him anxiously, heard him converse more brilliantly, or tell better anecdotes, keeping everyone round him amused; the one thing wanting was the appetite due after his morning's work. Not a bit did he put in his own mouth, while assiduously supplying others. Something was wrong, the Colonel feared; a fit of depression was coming on; and his fears were too well grounded.

Mr. Knighton's plan was that after luncheon the sportsmen should proceed to a distant part of his property, where still better shooting was always to be had; and the arrangements were being made when Everard drew his friend aside.

"I have had enough of this, Tyrwhitt. Make my excuses to Mr. Knighton. I am going for a tramp by myself."

"Just as you like, old fellow," said the Colonel, more cheerfully than he felt; "I'll settle all that. But, I say, look here—if you feel overdone, why not slip home and let my wife make you comfortable? She knows what a fellow wants when he is beat—one better——"

"I am sure of it; but what I want she cannot give me. When I am fit to talk to her, I'll find my way to your house. Yes, thanks, I know my bearings, and shall keep out of the way. You can tell me all about it at dinner."

He was gone without another word, and Colonel Tyrwhitt was

staring after him with so perplexed a look in his face that one of the young Knightons came up to ask if anything was the matter.

"To tell you the truth, Ronald, I am not happy in my mind about my friend Luttrell. He is not well, and I fancy has done too much this morning; but those medical bigwigs are so despotic, I could do nothing with him. He is bent on walking off his indisposition, whatever it is; but I hate his being alone somehow."

"All right, Colonel; I'll shadow him—stalk him as he did that stag he told us of. He shall not see me unless I have to be useful, and then I shall only be rabbiting, you know. I'll take my gun as a proof."

"Well, if you can, without his finding it out, I shall be much obliged to you, my boy; but you will be losing all the afternoon. And the ladies—I understood some of them meant to walk with us and see the fun—what will they say to your not being in attendance?"

"Never mind what they say. The only one I should care to attend upon is not here, and you know that as well as I do."

"I know nothing of the sort, you impudent young dog! We hear all sorts of stories about you at the Combe, and the sooner they are contradicted, the better for your credit. If you succeed in stalking Luttrell—and, mind you, he'll never forgive you if he finds you out, or me either—you may as well come and meet him at dinner. He goes to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted," said the young man heartily, and the glow on his cheeks testified to his truth. If the valued guest had suddenly felt better, and come back to rejoin the party, it is to be feared the young gentleman would have felt rather disappointed.

There was little difficulty in the pursuit at first. Everard Luttrell had struck across the open, evidently making for a wooded hill beyond; and as it never occurred to him that he might be followed, he never looked back. The pace, Ronald thought, was surprising for a Londoner out of condition; he had to do all he knew to keep him in sight; but when the wood had been gained by the pursued, the pursuer changed his tactics.

"He seems to know the country—means, perhaps, to rest a bit in the wood. It won't do to run up against him there. I must keep outside, and view him when he breaks covert. He means to take the round by the lane and the village, I suppose. A tidy spin for a doctor out of sorts. I wonder if he gives this prescription, as a rule, to seedy patients? It would be a splendid cure for the gout!"

It was well for all concerned that he refrained from investigating the wood. Everard had entered it for the sake of solitude and silence; and had he caught sight of anyone just then, would have hurried on in his feverish impatience till he actually dropped from exhaustion. He made his way along a track that led to a clearing in the heart of the wood, and there sat down on a log, with his head on

his hands, and allowed the wave of his soul's anguish to roll over him unresisted.

The first phase was the easiest to bear; it was a rush of tender memories that brought with it the relief of tears. No one was near to see them or to witness the deep sobs that heaved his breast, and he gave way the rather that he knew the softening would not last. The torment of these dark hours was in the thoughts he abhorred, but could not put aside. He knew they were coming—felt their hot breath, so to speak, on his spirit, and braced himself, as he had often before, to wrestle until they were overcome—as a man must who realises the danger of defeat. And wrestle he did in the quiet shade of the trees, till he was shaken and trembling all over—wiping the dew from his forehead, and glad that his flask had not been left behind with his gun.

It was over, he knew, for the time; and when he had sufficiently recovered he proceeded on his walk, as young Knighton had conjectured. He was one who never forgot his way, and though he had not been in that part lately, there had been few alterations, and he went on without pause or check, across country towards a winding road, or rather lane, by which he knew he should reach the village. The church tower was in sight as he descended the hill, and the nearest lodge of the Combe was about a mile beyond; but he had had time to realise that it was a long round altogether before his solitude was broken in upon by an unexpected meeting.

A turn of the endless lane showed him the light figure of his god-daughter, Cecile Tyrwhitt, mounted on a lively little chestnut mare, and followed by a very small boy on an old grey pony. The meeting was equally unexpected on her part, and with an exclamation of joy she drew in her rein.

"This is a piece of good fortune, indeed! But why are you alone, godpapa? Nothing the matter, I hope?"

He reassured her with a brief explanation, and turned to walk by her side.

"I might inquire why you did not come to the luncheon. I heard you asked for."

"Who asked for me?" The question was sharply put.

"A young lady—Miss Bellamy I think her name was, who came with Mrs. Knighton's party, and evidently expected to meet you there."

"I daresay; but there were very good reasons why she did not. Would you mind walking on with me while Jack rides into the village to leave a basket for me with a friend? I was going there myself, but I would much rather have a talk with you. It is what I have longed for ever since you came."

"I'm at your service, my dear. Give your orders, and I will be Jack's deputy in his absence."

"Mother does not like me to ride quite alone," Cecile explained, as

her small escort rode away, "unless I am on the old pony, and I very much prefer my Pamela, though she does dance and prance sometimes. In the shooting-season there is no one available but Jack, and I believe in his heart he would rather be with the shooters. You had good sport, I hope?"

"Excellent."

"And you admired Maud Bellamy? All the gentlemen do."

"So I should suppose, for they seemed to gather round her directly."

"I know—I know. I am going to make you a grievous confession. We were friends once—now I hate her!"

"Not because she is admired?"

"No; I could admire her myself, if she would not always make me feel miserable and cross and resentful; so that I have been obliged to say I would not go anywhere to meet her. Now, look here—should you care to meet a person, passing as your friend, who always pretended to misunderstand what you said, making out that it was something quite different, and extremely foolish—who never let you enjoy a talk with anyone you liked, but contrived to strike in and draw him away—who could not be contented without being, not only the first, but the only person attended to and thought of, and who wouldn't scruple to say anything, true or untrue, that would move a hindrance out of her way? I am sure you would not; and neither do I."

He looked up at her rather sadly. Only seventeen, with a face like a rose and giving out such bitterness! That something was wrong with her, he had divined from the first; her spirits had struck him as rather forced and he had noticed an anxious watching in the mother's eyes. And now he felt convinced there was more to come, which he must not check by any reproving word.

He had made a pet of her from her childhood. Though rarely meeting, his name had from the first been associated in her mind with delightful surprises, charming birthday presents, amusing letters and kind interest in all her being, doing, and suffering. It was natural, therefore, that where the last was concerned she should tell him what she would have allowed no one to ask. But he was not prepared for her next piece of confidence.

"I want to ask your advice and help. Mother said I might, and that I could not have a safer adviser. You see she knows nothing about it herself, because in her young days things were different."

"Not so different as you young people are apt to suppose, Cecile."

"Well, everybody says that the changes in the last twenty years have been very great. I mean, about what women may do, and learn, and all that. You have no old world prejudices about women, have you?"

"My prejudices, such as they are, are mostly in their favour—especially at sweet seventeen. What do you want to do?"

"I want to be a nurse. Stop—don't begin by telling me I have duties at home. Father and mother will object to nothing that you approve, and they both say they only want me to be happy. Now, I am not happy, and I am determined not to pretend that I am. About nursing I have heard a great deal from a particular friend of mine living here, who went through exams. without end, and got certificates, and was regularly employed in London. She and her husband—he is our doctor—have invalids sometimes to board with them, whom nobody else can manage; and it is wonderful what she does with difficult cases."

"I can quite believe it. Some of our best nurses are ladies."

"Then being a lady you do not consider an objection?"

"On the contrary; given the other qualifications, the better the lady the better the nurse. You want my assistance in becoming one—your parents' approval taken for granted?"

"Yes, indeed I do. It will be so kind!"

"Then I shall begin with a piece of advice, more important than you suppose."

"Stop one minute. I know what it is. You want me to think it well over, and to make sure I can put up with sharp words from superiors, and being set to do hard work, cleaning and scrubbing and all that. I assure you, my friend's own experience is like a manual. She has made me see the very worst side of a nurse's life, and it has not changed my mind in the least."

"So much the better for your purpose, but she has not taught you one thing—to wait till you have heard the doctor speak before you answer him. You may have gone through all you tell me, and more, and yet be unfit for a nurse, if part of your equipment is—a *grievance*. Let nothing induce you to suppose that change of scene, change of occupation, and all the rest of it, will stop the mischief. A nurse's cheerfulness is part of her stock-in-trade, and, like other stock, ought to be genuine; and the cheerfulness that is only put on with your cap and apron will be as great a sham as your skill would be under the same circumstances. Here are you, dear child, with these thorns in your heart—the friend who is playing you false—the estrangement from somebody that she has brought about, the sense of being laughed at, or whatever the annoyance may be; and you think that when you are away from home they will not rankle as they do now. You are quite mistaken. There are times, again and again, when a trained nurse has to fall back upon her own thoughts for solace and occupation while remaining perfectly still. If such thoughts as those keep her company then her nerves must suffer, and nerves mean temper. To feel your temper failing you is bad enough in our profession. It is ten times worse in a nurse's."

His tone impressed her more than his words; it brought back a

vague recollection of something sad having happened to him years ago, when she was supposed to hear nothing. A longing to cheer his spirits made her press the hand he had laid on the pommel of her saddle.

"I am sure of one thing, my dear godfather, that you have had no experience of that kind."

"God forbid, my dear," was his answer, "that any experience of yours should ever be like mine!" Then, with a quick change of voice—"Pull up, Cecile! Your pony is limping. A stone in her shoe most likely. This road-mending plays sad tricks with the horses."

He picked up a good-sized pebble as he spoke, and gently stroking down the slender leg took the hoof in his hand, Cecile saying soft things to her pet the while, telling her how honoured she ought to be at having such first-rate attendance. A dexterous tap or two had just remedied the evil, when the report of a gun behind the hedge made the nervous creature start in terror, lash out wildly, and bound forward several yards before her rider could recover control of the bridle. In fact, if she had not been a good horsewoman, she must have been thrown. As it was, she did not know what had happened till she had quieted and turned Pamela round, and then saw Everard Luttrell lying motionless on his face.

The shriek that burst from her lips was heard by two persons. Jack, having accomplished his errand, came cantering up in consternation; and bursting through the hedge, his gun in one hand and a rabbit in the other, Ronald Knighton sprang into the lane.

"Cecile! My darling! What is it? Are you hurt?"

He had caught the rein, and his arm was round her as she slipped from her saddle.

"Oh, no, no—but he is! Look there! Oh, what shall we do?"

However great his consternation, he did not lose his presence of mind. The hunting-field had taught him something about accidents, and a brief inspection of the injured man convinced him that the case required both skill and care. The least jolt in moving him might be of serious consequence; Dr. Cameron's was the nearest house, and Jack must go there at once for help. If the doctor was out, he must ride after him; but meanwhile the patient must be carried to his house. Mrs. Cameron would know what was required; she was nearly as good a doctor as her husband.

"Don't be frightened, my darling," he went on, as poor Cecile, sick and faint, sat down on the ground, just capable of holding Pamela's bridle, but about as unfit for a nurse's duties as Pamela herself. "He has had a nasty kick, but men get those constantly without being much the worse in the end."

It was a bold assertion, but ignorance is not critical. Cecile was still at the innocent stage of belief in the superior knowledge of man; and her hope revived, though not her self-respect.

"I had just been telling him I wanted to be a nurse. I shall never dare to say so again after this,"

"Of course not; your duties lie in a different direction, as I shall be happy to point out. It is I who have to reproach myself for my unlucky shot."

And while doing all he could venture for the unconscious sufferer, he explained in a few words how he had been tracking him at her father's request, and had shot the rabbit by way of excuse should he have been accidentally discovered.

"I had no idea you were with him; I shall hate the sight of my gun if it has really brought you sorrow."

"Oh, I hope—I must hope, or I should hate poor Pamela. It was no fault of yours; you—you are always kind."

It was a strange time for explanations, a terrible possibility in front, and at the best, a fact whose consequences no one could foresee; but when Cecile in after life recalled that hour of misery, it was strangely mixed with a memory of sweetness beyond compare. Her dear friend was in danger, her dream of useful womanhood had been rudely dispelled; but Ronald had come to help and comfort her, and things might have been—oh, so much worse.

II.

"If you please, Mrs. Cameron, you're wanted at home directly, ma'am. Colonel Tyrwhitt's boy has come on the pony to find you, and the Doctor says it's most particular, if you please."

"At home, did you say, or at Colonel Tyrwhitt's?"

"At home, ma'am. It's a gentleman as has been took there; a bad accident, the boy says. He don't think he'll ever get over it."

"Then he had better keep his thoughts to himself. Tell him to go back and say I am coming."

The doctor's wife was as well known among his village patients as himself; her skill as a trained nurse making her exceedingly popular. Calmly as she had received the summons, she did not lose a minute in obeying it, taking a short cut across the church meadows, only available on foot. They kept a room reserved for patients, and it was seldom vacant for long; more, people were too apt to say, on her account than on his. The reception of these boarders was an essential part of their small income, for Dr. Cameron was not a popular man. Devoted to his profession, he loved experiments and investigations more than the whims or woes of sick people; the practice he had bought had proved less lucrative than had been represented, and he had been disappointed whenever he had been a candidate for anything in the neighbourhood worth having. And as nothing succeeds like success, so nothing is a greater hindrance than being spoken of as "not getting on."

But he had one strong point, and he knew it; that was his wife. ...

Miriam Cameron, as she came along the short cut across the church meadows that September afternoon, with a step so easy and elastic that its swiftness was scarcely perceptible, might have been taken as a fair specimen by the advocates of modern training. The intellect in brow and eye had been allowed ample culture, and the well-knit frame ample exercise. She had in fact, been allowed, from her early teens, to follow her own bent both in study and recreation; and having worked her way, satisfactorily, through classes and examinations, and trained hand, and foot, and eye, in a variety of pastimes, had taken up nursing as a profession, with all its preliminary discipline. And before she had been a nurse very long she married a physician—which, some lazy people suggested, she might have done without all that trouble. But no keen observer of countenances, who studied hers, could fail to see how the grinding of the wheel had brought out the polish of the gem. There was a latent sense of power in her features which had impressed Cecile's young mind unawares; and part of her secret attraction lay in the sadness that in thoughtful moments would soften her dark eyes. The experience which had ripened her understanding had not been without cost.

As she reached her own door there seemed to be a little crowd gathered round it; Cecile on Pamela, with Ronald Knighton holding her bridle—Jack behind on the grey pony; and two or three labourers, who had been helping to carry the patient, were lingering to hear the last report; but she was allowed no time for questions. Her husband was on the watch, and his call was imperative. She was with him in an instant, and saw him so strongly agitated that she took care to look just the reverse.

"Is it a bad case, dear? The room was all ready and so am I—only sorry you had to send after me. Anyone I know?"—for there was an indescribable something in his face, as if he wanted to prepare her for a shock.

"Yes," was the reply, almost in a hoarse whisper. "I daresay you would have known him though he looks much older than when I saw him last. Miriam, it is Everard Luttrell."

She was but a woman, for all her certificates. He put her into a chair, and hurried for a restorative, watching in silence till her lips regained their colour. Then, in answer to her look, for she could not articulate, he told what he knew of the case, the treatment to be carried out, and the probabilities as far as he had had time to put them together.

She could understand and appreciate, if she could not talk; and when he paused she bent her head in assent, and rose to prepare for immediate service. Not till she was safe in her own room would she venture to relax her self-control, and then only for a few minutes. By the time she had assumed her place in the patient's chamber she was outwardly herself again.

That such an event as Luttrell's accident should be discussed in the papers was only to be expected. He was far too popular and too

necessary to be thus suddenly laid by without causing a great deal of anxiety and excitement. The local and county papers found themselves quite in request; and emissaries from London journals haunted the village, waylaid the servants at the Combe, and tried desperately to get inside Dr. Cameron's door. So many telegrams had to be received and answered that Cecile's offer of help was accepted, and she was at the house every day; her father consenting the more readily, that it was impossible to move the patient to his house. Curiously enough, Cecile's visits were generally at the same hour that Ronald Knighton came over for a bulletin. His help, of course, was invaluable, and they really got through a good deal of work during the first days of alarm, while the patient hovered between life and death. The whole neighbourhood, for miles round, wanted to be equally useful, and enough game, fruit, and jelly to supply a sick ward were sent in before any could be of avail to the unconscious Everard. It was part of the young people's work to carry shares of these dainties to patients "whom nobody cared about"—a slight compensation for the absence of Mrs. Cameron, whose whole strength and time were required by her charge.

No small excitement was caused one day by the arrival of an eminent brother-surgeon, popularly supposed to be intensely jealous of his rival, and eager to profit by the golden opportunity. As a matter of fact, he would have given more gold than he had ever received to have seen Everard Luttrell at work once more; and he did all in his power. Dr. Cameron, with whom he had a long consultation, received his suggestions as something beyond price; but the great man's face was very grave when he took leave, with strict injunctions that he was to be sent for should there be any change for the worse.

"Much will depend," he told Mrs. Cameron at parting, "on the state of his brain when he regains consciousness. Very likely he will wander a little—never mind that. The great point is that his mind should not be distressed. There has been too much of that already."

"It shows what opinion Sir Niel Kenton has of you as a nurse, Miriam," was her husband's comment, "that he should tell you that so plainly. I noticed a change in his manner directly he knew that I had worked under poor Luttrell, and been at one time his pupil. Shouldn't wonder if he gave me a lift up the hill; a word from a man like that would be the making of a fellow. If only we can pull through this!"

"If only——!" was her reply; "we could then afford to wait for the rest."

Sir Niel's forecast was soon verified. Miriam had been lying down for a short interval, when her husband came in to report the important change. Luttrell had recognised him, without appearing surprised; only fancied they were watching a case together, and that he had been allowed to sleep too long.

"I quieted him with a promise to call him up if there was any change; and now he is asleep again, and much will depend on his next waking."

"I shall be there," was her answer; and in a few minutes she was again at her post, from which indeed she was never absent a minute longer than she could help. In point of fact, as Cecile told Ronald in confidence, Miriam's theory was one thing and her practice another. She had maintained that a nurse must lose her efficiency if she neglected the rules about rest, diet, and exercise; and here she was setting them all at defiance.

"And if one says a word, she looks so sad one can say no more. If nursing is really this sort of thing, I am afraid it would never do for me."

"No, my darling," was Ronald's answer, "and nobody ever thought it would. The only patient it would be safe for you to meddle with would be myself. But Mrs. Cameron knows what she is about, and, depend upon it, she has her reasons."

She had stronger reasons than he imagined. Even her husband, who might have known more, did not guess how deeply she was feeling—how the whole of her future life's peace seemed to hang on what the sick man's waking might bring. Never, perhaps, in the whole of her past had her eyes been such "homes of silent prayer" as during that afternoon's vigil, when the practised quiescence of the body was in such contrast with the restless activity of the mind. The room had been necessarily kept in semi-darkness on the patient's account, and as the autumn day faded it would have been difficult for an unaccustomed watcher to distinguish the pale face from its pillow. Even she was just considering whether it were safe to draw the curtain a little more from the window, when there was a slight movement in the bed, the heavy eyelids were lifted, and the eyes rested on hers. Then, with a pleased look of surprise, such as we have all felt in our time, when a dream returns, of which we say to ourselves, "This time it is real!" came the low, glad words, "Why, Mary!"

His nurse's heart gave a bound that almost turned her faint, but she smiled in answer to his smile, smoothed the quilt, and moistened his lips. He made a feeble attempt to take her hand, and when she gave it to him, drew it to his cheek with a sigh of comfort and relief.

"I really thought—I must have dreamed—you were——"

The sentence was left unfinished, but the happy look lasted while she gave him the appointed spoonfuls, and lingered on his face after he had again dropped into a doze. And that doze became the most natural, healthy sleep he had had yet. Now and then, at first, his lips moved; and more than once her ear could catch the murmur of pleasure, almost like that of a child, "My Mary—my own!"

"Oh, God!" prayed the nurse, as the tears ran noiselessly down her cheeks, "if Thine angel be indeed present, let it be with healing in her wings!"

Whatever brought the healing, it was certainly there. He improved from that hour—up to a certain point. How long the sweet dream lasted they never knew; Miriam believed she could detect a look that was again surprise, without the joy; but, as nothing was said, she could not be certain. His mind cleared itself by degrees, and he could converse for awhile with Dr. Cameron, and take some professional interest in his own case. Then he was able to ask after friends, take account of time, and express gratitude for what had been done for him. Then he was moved to a sofa, and then into a sitting-room. And people began to speculate how soon he would be considered quite well.

As a step to that desired end, Sir Niel Kenton came down again, and remained with him some time alone. Before taking leave, he said a few words to Dr. Cameron that delighted him extremely, as well they might; and then begged to have a few more with his wife. A brief but earnest conversation followed, and the great surgeon drove away to catch his train.

Husband and wife watched his departure, and turned to exchange confidences.

"I told you, Miriam, it would be the making of us. Luttrell has got him to give me his vote and interest for the next vacancy—it must come soon—at—hospital, the very thing I most wished for. What did he tell you that makes you look like that?"

For instead of the delight he expected, her face was troubled and anxious.

"He told me," she said slowly, "that unless he was roused now that he has reached this point, either his mind or his body would sink—he feared most for the mind."

"Do you see your way to doing it?" almost whispered the doctor.

"I see one way—only one. If it fails, I can do no more."

"Cecile, my dear, your godfather has asked for you and I promised you would go this afternoon."

Colonel Tyrwhitt had been allowed to visit his friend, and had derived but small comfort from the interview.

"Aye," he went on, in answer to his daughter's inquiry, "they say he is recovering; but I don't like the looks of him. He begins to talk like his old self, and then, all in a minute, his mind seems miles away, and there is a sad look in his eyes that breaks your heart. He gives me the idea—in spite of his good sense and ability—of a man who does not think it worth his while to get better. I have known more than one poor fellow in hospital lose his number for no other reason."

"But, dear papa, are you sure my visit will do him no harm?" faltered Cecile.

"Sure? No; but a little idle chatter will make a change; only mind you are perfectly natural, and at your ease, or you may do more harm than good."

"Easier said than done," thought poor Cecile, but she went, resolved to do her best, and was agreeably surprised by his quiet, affectionate greeting.

The room where he now passed most of the day, on a sofa, was always kept in a sort of twilight, and a screen protected his eyes from the bright little fire that the shortening afternoons made necessary. His watchful nurse, who could knit in any light, not to say darkness, sat quietly employed, where she could observe him without appearing to do so; and her cheerful way of talking helped the young visitor to overcome the lump in her throat, and do as her father had told her.

"You owe me a good turn, my dear Cecile," said the invalid, as she drew a low chair near his sofa, and took his hand. "No hospital training would do for you what Mrs. Cameron's example and instructions may, if you are in a teachable frame. Such a nurse does not cross one's path every day."

"I know that; but I have learned my lesson. I look upon good nurses with reverence—perhaps with envy—but I am not fitted to be one of them."

"Is the grievance still so heavy?" A faint smile had flickered over his face which grew stronger as the colour flew into hers.

"Oh, no, no—I have no grievance now—except indeed"—as if an after-thought—"your being laid up like this through Pamela's fault, or mine."

"No one's fault, my dear; these things happen every day, only the objects of your envy are not always so near at hand." He inclined his head to Miriam as he spoke, and she saw the opportunity for which she had been waiting.

"We are not always to be envied," she said as she laid down her knitting, moved to the window, and, having re-arranged the curtain, slipped into a seat where her face was almost hidden. "I could tell you a story, Cecile, of my own experience, that would give you quite another impression."

The dreaded shadow was coming over his eyes, and she durst not wait for encouragement. Cecile, however, while stroking her godfather's hand, discovered that his attention was caught directly the story began.

"I was called in to nurse a lady once under unusual circumstances. Her husband, one of the rising surgeons of that day, had been summoned into the country to a most urgent and difficult case; and soon after his departure she met with an accident that disabled her right arm. Her husband's colleague and former pupil attended her, and as I had worked under him already, he sent for me, her servants having no idea of nursing. It was a simple case, but required care, and she was as fragile as she was beautiful."

Cecile felt the thin fingers tighten on her own, but he made no other sign. The speaker's voice went on, after a moment's pause, with bell-like distinctness.

"At that time—you are too young to know much about it—there was a great talk among medical men of a new treatment for consumption that was to work wonderful cures. The same thing has occurred since and become widely known; this was the dream of a few months only. The doctor was keen about it, and I soon found that my sweet patient had her own reasons for sharing his enthusiasm. She was doomed, and she knew it; and in the sleepless hours of the night she confided to me her passionate longing to try the new remedy, so as to give herself the chance of a few more years with her husband. She had begged him to give it her in vain—the first thing he had ever refused her. Either he doubted the treatment or feared the risk. His very affection stood in the way; but if it were done in his absence, and he found her with a new lease of life on his return, what reward would he think too much? And then, with what confidence would he carry to other despairing households the deliverance accomplished in his own!

"My better judgment was against her, but before I had time to remonstrate she was weeping on my shoulder, imploring me to give her just this chance of life.

"I was wrong, Cecile, and I make no excuse; but I could not resist those tears, those eyes, that pleading voice. I helped her to overcome the doctor's scruples—scruples on his friend's account, for he was sanguine as to the result—and the attempt was made.

"All seemed going well at first; then—we were obliged to own her husband had known best, and he was sent for, but came too late.

"She had said to me, just before becoming unconscious, 'It was my one disobedience—ask him to forgive me.'

"I was too ill at the time to give that message, and afterwards he would not see me; a letter I wrote came back to me unopened. So it has waited all these years to be given—at last!"

With the two closing words the clear voice dropped, and silence fell upon the darkening room.

Then Cecile felt the grip on her hand relax, and the invalid rose from the sofa and crossed over to Miriam's chair.

"Mrs. Cameron"—she hardly knew the voice, it was so full of intense feeling—"I never imagined this; I have done you cruel injustice, and this is your revenge. For pity's sake, say that you forgive me! You would, if you had ever felt for one hour the agony of being unable to forgive!"

His hand grasped hers, and as he felt her tears fall upon it his own burst forth like rain—such rain as sweeps away the germs of death and brings health both to body and soul.

Later on, when he could talk quietly with his hosts about the past, he touched on what had been the burden of his solitary years—the morbid tendency to brood over his loss as an unavenged wrong.

Knowing what madness lay that way, he had done his best to fight it down ; but had never felt secure that the bitterness would not return. With Cameron he had broken from the first, and had never heard whom he had married. His private belief had been that nurse and doctor had either persuaded or deceived his poor Mary between them. How difficult it was to resist her entreaties no one knew better than himself.

With the interchange of pardon his peace of mind returned, never to be lost again ; and in due time his strength also.

His gratitude was of the enduring character natural to such a man, and in proportion to the suffering from which he had been relieved. It was not only his former pupil who might date the period of Everard's accident as the turning-point in his own career, largely as he and his benefitted by the friendship thus happily restored. When able to hear the whole story of his own adventure, Luttrell insisted on the point, disputed as it might be, that his real benefactor was the lad who had shadowed him. But for his shooting that rabbit, he might never have known what he knew now. And, being thus burdened with obligation, it was needful to take Cecil into his confidence as to the best method of discharging it.

How much the parents of both parties had surmised before was never quite clear ; what they *were* certain about was, that a younger son, with no profession, was not to be encouraged to engage himself, however charming the young lady. How this objection was overcome would take too long to explain ; but the fact that during that winter a Government appointment was procured for Ronald Knighton, from a distinguished patient of Everard's, coupled with an assertion that, as Cecile's godfather, he had a right to see that she had enough to live upon, will perhaps be considered to explain itself.

When he pleaded his own lost happiness, and his longing to see its image in the lives of others, little was left for prudence or scruples to reply.

Had that face, so dearly loved, indeed visited his pillow, a messenger from Heaven to lead him back to life and usefulness ? Had she longed, even in her sweet rest, for an assurance that he did forgive, or was it only the half-waking dream of weakened nerves, to be put aside as unworthy a serious thought ?

He never spoke of it, but he never put it aside.

THE VALLEY OF THE RHONE.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN LOTUS LAND,"
"THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," ETC., ETC.



LE PUY.

WE left Geneva one fine morning with all its atmosphere historical and mystic.

From Rousseau's Island we had looked downwards towards the far-stretching waters of the lake; and upwards upon the old town rising on the slopes of the hill, crowned by the old cathedral with its unequal towers: that cathedral where Calvin had propagated his doctrines with unswerving purpose. To the right rose the magnificent Alpine chain, crowned by Mont Blanc: a view that is the great glory of Geneva. We had looked upon it all and turned away; settled our hotel bill with satisfaction

and departed with delight from its unrestful doors.

The train passed through lovely scenes on its way to Bourg, where we intended to halt for some hours for the sake of seeing the famous Eglise de Brou. Two quaint and curious old people shared the carriage; a little old man and a little old woman. Both looked withered and somewhat shrivelled; yet there was something interesting about their faces. An expression of human sympathy and kindness on his part; a pathetic, appealing look on hers. It was easy to see that life had not been a bed of roses with them. They had evidently suffered; evidently walked through life together,

sharing each other's burdens, and probably helping to bear the burdens of others.

So much their expression told us, but it could go no further; a broad outline, the details of which could only be filled in verbally. They conversed in measured undertones, as though the atmosphere of peace and repose about them must not be disturbed by anything beyond a murmur. One felt that the rattle of the carriage, the click-clack of the train, must be purgatory to souls so serene. In the scenery they took intense interest, though they said they had lived amongst it all their lives; but they evidently had a love for all things beautiful.

And beautiful indeed were the mountains, vales and little rivers amidst which the train took its winding course. We ascended the Rhone Valley towards Nantua, with its picturesque lake. Here we had entered the French Jura, with a right to feel at home on our native soil. At La Cluse our little people alighted. He helped his wife very carefully out of the carriage; they bade us good-bye with the graceful little ceremonies the French are so fond of using, and walked away arm in arm very quietly and composedly.

We continued our journey by the broad river side, through gorges, under the very shadow of precipitous rocky hills, until at length, in the centre of a great plain, we reached Bourg.

The hour for déjeuner had arrived, and madame at the buffet was equal to a public dinner, not to speak of a small luncheon. She received us with a gracious court-curtsey thrice repeated, relieved us of coats, baggage and every impedimenta which she took under her special protection; and then having placed before us a very refined collation to which H. C. did ample justice, directed us on our way.

The town was more uninteresting than we had anticipated from its history. This ancient capital of La Bresse ought to have possessed many vestiges of the past, many antique remains. In the thirteenth century it belonged to the House of Savoy. Francis I.—that monarch of contradictions—took it in 1538; and in 1600 it finally became French. It is a town of some 16,000 inhabitants, and there is nothing to indicate how they live. No special trade distinguishes it. In the quiet streets the weaver's shuttle is never heard; factory chimneys are conspicuous by their absence. The place is dull and depressing; here and there grass grows between the stones.

Certainly the day we visited it was a Sunday, and so we saw it dressed in its best. Though liking to make Sunday a day of rest, on this occasion we had to yield to circumstances and make it a day of travelling. The people were all at leisure. Women sat at their doors basking in the sunshine, gossiping and discussing the affairs of the nation over *Le Petit Journal*. Groups of men and women in clean white caps and neat shawls and blue smock frocks passed down the country roads carrying great red and green umbrellas.

Our own special object in being here as we have said was to visit

the church of Notre Dame de Brou. This was outside the town in the Faubourg St. Nicholas. As madame at the buffet had declared, in giving us minute directions, it was impossible to miss the way: and so in due time we found ourselves facing this *Monument Historique*.

Of course disappointment was our first impression. It was being elaborately restored. Part of it was boarded up; all the north side was hideous with scaffolding. The west front was so renewed that it might have been a work of to-day. Yet we had expected to find it perfectly untouched: had been told that no workman's brush, chisel or hammer had desecrated it for three centuries.

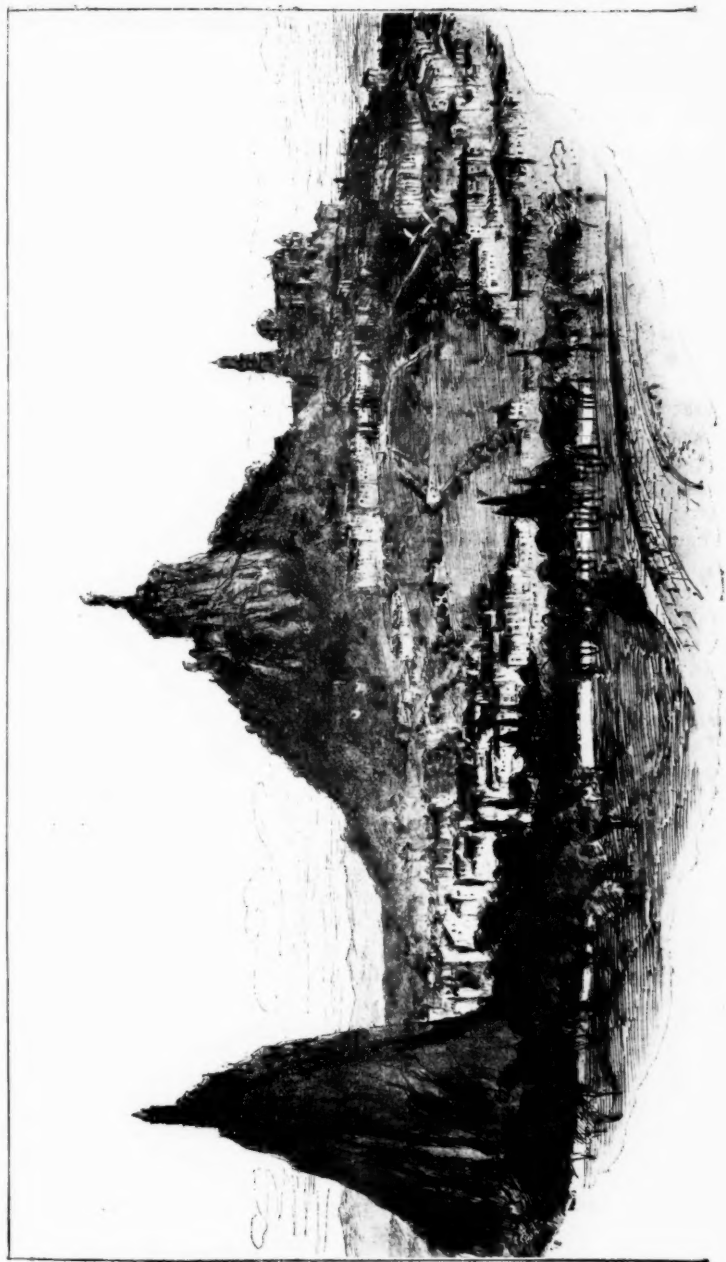
The church dates from the early fifteenth century and is late Gothic influenced by Renaissance; the result being not very satisfactory. It is large and spacious, and one feels how fine it ought to have been and might have been had it been built a century or two earlier. The whole interior looks new and modern and is terribly deficient in tone. A garish light spoils all. The church was built by Margaret of Austria, daughter of Maximilian, and wife of Philibert le Beau, Duke of Savoy. Margaret had been created by her father Governor of the Netherlands, and was possessed of considerable power. The church arose in fulfilment of a vow made by her mother-in-law, Margaret of Bourbon.

Its simple interior would be striking and effective but for its modern tone. But it possesses rare treasures—the most splendid monuments in France, which well repay a visit. Amongst them is that of Margaret, with her motto *Fortune—Infortune—Forte une*—of which the sense is rather gathered than is quite apparent. We asked the Suisse—who was rather above his order—the exact meaning of the words; the local or traditional interpretation. "Ah, monsieur," he replied, looking very wise, "on ne sait pas; *c'est perdu dans l'obscurité!*" "Come good fortune or come ill, we will be strong to bear," was no doubt Margaret's idea expressed in this jeu de mots.

The central tomb, most magnificent of all, is that of Philibert, Margaret's husband. Below he is represented as dying and above as dead. It is profusely enriched with angels and pillars and statuettes, all marvellously carved. Most beautiful is the rood screen, and the stalls of the choir are rich and elaborate. There is a little good painted glass in the chapels, but not sufficient to influence the tone of the interior.

We walked through a long avenue of trees and struck across into some fields, and the view of the church from the distance, rising in clear-cut outlines against the blue sky was very picturesque.

Not far from the church, we found a wonderful worker in ceramic art: a Monsieur Louis Bozonnet: who from drawings, verbal descriptions, ancient fragments and mosaics, reproduces ancient vases: Greek, Roman, Ethiopian, Egyptian. These we found quite works of art. His patrons are from all countries, all ranks of life. One of his earliest friends was Alexandre Dumas père, of whom he



LE PUY.

showed us many letters. Once Dumas had spent a week under his roof; had written there part of one of his works. The chair, the table, the inkstand and pen he used, everything was religiously preserved; making our visit—in conjunction with the letters—doubly interesting. The room was so small that Dumas' portly presence must have half filled it.

Of the vases we bought, the following descriptions will give some idea of this real artist's work:

"No. 44. Reconstitution d'après un dessin antique (archéologique Primard) d'une paire de vases de Galbe Pompeien. Ce modèle, dont le temps n'a conservé aucun type, et qui conséquemment ne se rencontre dans aucun musée, fut l'un des plus intéressants spécimens du bel art de la céramique, durant la période impériale où de tels vases étaient créés en Italie par des Céramistes Grecs lesquels importaient de leur patrie les argiles et les engobes dont ils se servaient. Les quatre personnages incrustés, un sur chacune des faces, symbolisent le peuple romain: Le Patriciat, la Législation, L'Armée, et les Arts. Le premier exemplaire de cette reconstitution a été rétabli à Canum-Brou pour Madame la Comtesse de Pierreclos, la niece de Lamartine, à qui elle les donna."

"No. 28. Vases lacrymatoires, Greco Corinthiens, reconstitution d'après un seul fragment. Le triomphe de la ligne serpentine. Le plus simple, mais le plus beau, le plus pur et le plus esthétique des vases antiques. Argile grise rosée d'une grande finesse; engobe noir très lustré de Corinthe; incrustations en Argile rouge de Sicile, représentant un prêtre et une femme (peut-être la veuve)."

Our examination of these artistic objects of the remote ages was so lengthened, that when we left, the shades of evening were falling.

But a change had also come over the sky. It was now obscured by dark clouds rolling up in dense masses ominous and threatening. As we hurried into the town, blinding flashes of lightning followed each other in quick succession, seemed to run about the heavens. A blacker, more portentous appearance we had never seen. The thunder rolled and crashed with terrific sound. Women screamed and crossed themselves and ran into open doorways for protection. Even the men looked startled. For ourselves, we felt there could not be a more sublime sight and sound.

Then, just as we reached the Hôtel de l'Europe, down came the rain in a perfect sheet. In a few moments the streets were flooded: the water ran down them like a small river. As we watched this phenomenal storm from the windows, madame entertained us with her experiences. How her heart was in her ménage, and she and her daughters did all they could to make their visitors comfortable. How in the summer-time—one would hardly believe it, perhaps—they were often crowded with visitors who came to see Notre Dame de Brou—ah, what a magnificent church was there!—and would remain two or three days to explore the interesting neighbourhood.

How once she had travelled as far as London, and the only thing she could clearly remember to have seen was London Bridge. She had rushed back to France effrayed at the distance which separated her from her beloved pays. On reaching Bourg (it was generally pronounced *Bourk* in the neighbourhood) she had burnt a hundred candles to Ste. Anne and made a little pilgrimage to a shrine that was not very far off. She hoped never to return to England. Voyaging was not in her line: she much preferred being at the head of her house, where she had a certain importance. And that reminded her that if we wished to catch the evening train to Lyons, we must dine without delay.

An excellent dinner madame prepared, and moderate were her charges. When it was over, and the bill had been paid, and madame hoped we should return next summer ("les excursions de l'hôtel en valaient bien la peine") we departed.

The storm had been short as severe. The skies were again clear, the stars shone through the purified atmosphere. The streets looked as though a deluge had passed that way; here and there stones remained wet, like tears half dried upon the cheek. We walked to the station, where madame at the buffet was on the look-out for us; hoped we had had a pleasant time; that we had not been too much agitated by the storm; handed us our luggage, and with another triple curtsy and a Bon voyage, messieurs, took her leave of us on the platform. The train came puffing up out of the darkness, and took us away again into the darkness; and about eleven o'clock at night deposited us safely in Lyons.

It was long since we had visited the old town, dear to us from many a recollection and for the sake of others who had passed away into the Silent Land. Lyons in spite of its being the second city in France, leaves much to be desired in the way of hotels. In situation the best is the Hôtel de l'Univers, and it is perhaps as comfortable as any.

We could see little of the town that night as we walked across the great square to the inn, and after our long day's pilgrimage we were more inclined for rest than for observation. It seemed a very long time since we had left Geneva in the early morning.

Our chief object in coming here was to go down the Rhone by boat, but in this we were destined to be disappointed. It was not to be done. The next day we renewed our acquaintance with Lyons, but whatever charm the place may once have possessed seemed to have evaporated. True, its rivers still flowed side by side, and nothing could take from the beauty and stateliness of the Rhone, or clear the turbid waters of its sister Saône. But the town itself seemed to have lost every vestige of antiquity. The streets were all new; a commercial element was everywhere visible; people hurried to and fro as though the flying moments were golden. In vain we looked for the ancient weavers' houses, listened for the sound

of the shuttle ; perhaps they are still to be heard and seen, but we never found them ; never found anything half so interesting or picturesque as a pale weaver at his loom.

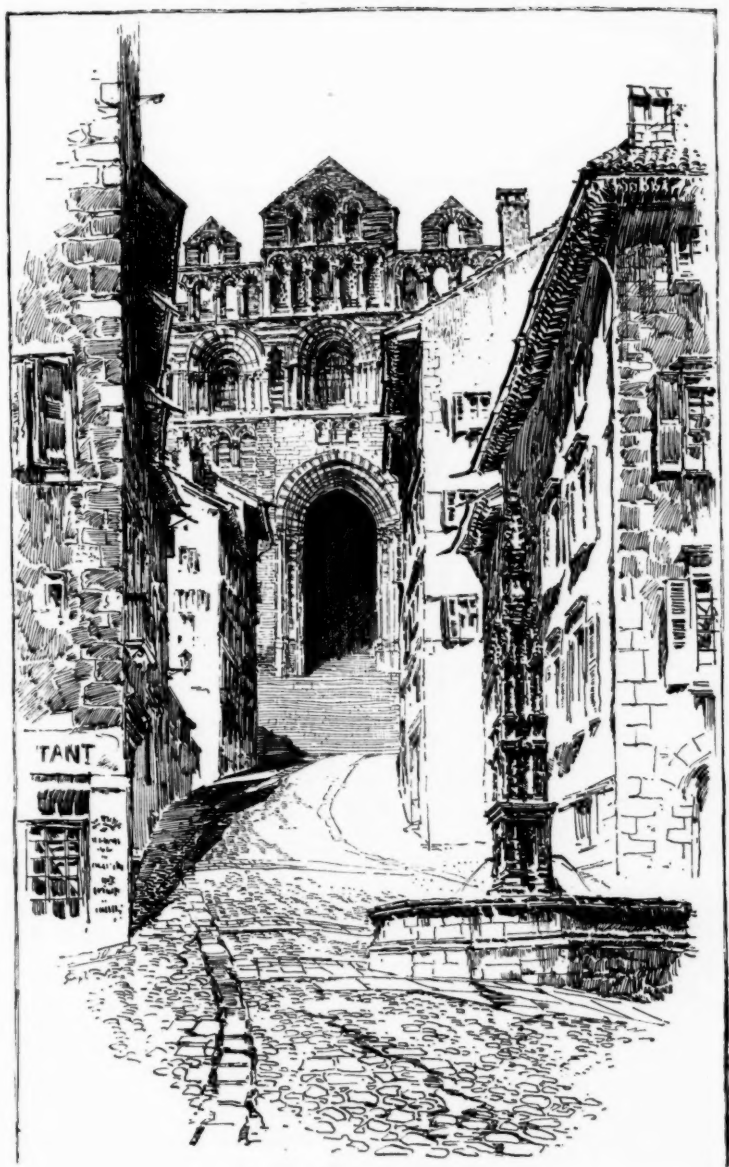
Of course there is much about the town that is stately, but it is all modern, and so far is commonplace. We went up to the heights of Fourvières, hoping to see that magnificent view, the chain of the Alps stretching far down into Italy with Mont Rosa for its crowning and concluding splendour. But mists hung about the mountains and valleys, and they were invisible. Seldom indeed does the view disclose itself in all its glory. On a clear day one hundred miles off rises Mont Blanc. To the south are the Dauphiné Alps and the mountains of the Grande Chartreuse, the great Mont Pilat not very far off. At our feet, as it were, the two majestic rivers run their course until we see them flowing into each other and mingling their waters.

One church interested us extremely, the church of St. Martin d'Aunay. Here we felt ourselves once more in an old and romantic world. The church is of both Pagan and Christian antiquity, and is of the greatest possible interest. It was founded as far back as the sixth century on the site of a temple erected to the goddess Roma and in honour of Augustus by the sixty nations or tribes of Gaul. Here at that time was the confluence of the rivers. Augustus lived for three years in Lyons. In the tenth century the church was rebuilt in the Romanesque style ; the crypt dates from the ninth century ; but a monastery existed at a much earlier date.

A young acolyte took us into the dungeons beneath the sacristy, where Pothinus and Blandina were confined before their martyrdom in the year 170. The sorrows of these Christian martyrs are recorded in an epistle of the churches of Vienna and Lyons to the Brethren in Asia and Phrygia.

Pothinus was Bishop of Lyons and upwards of ninety years old when he was thrown into this dungeon, where in two days death set him free. But Blandina, a converted slave, younger and more enduring, was put to great torture. After being scourged and exposed to fire in an iron chair she was thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre. No wonder, in such dungeons, that two days put an end to the life of the aged martyr. The cells are small, without light and air, and below the level of the river. They could only be entered by crawling in upon hands and knees. A sense of suffocation seized those who were confined within them.

Lyons had already existed for some centuries when this took place. It was first founded in the year 560 B.C., but little is heard of it until the year 41 B.C. Later on Augustus made it the capital of Celtic Gaul. Claudius was born here and made it a Roman colony. Nero rebuilt it after it had been burnt down—not by himself. St. Pothinus was its first Christian Bishop, the first to preach Christianity here, and Blandina was one of his converts.



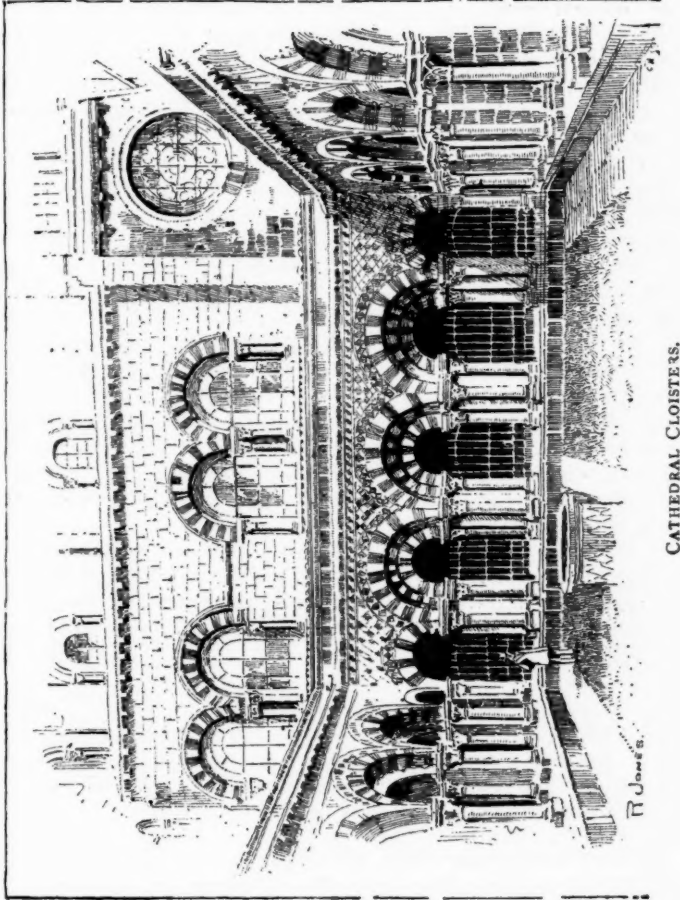
WEST FRONT OF CATHEDRAL.

Then came the invasion of the barbarians, and Lyons knew little peace until at the end of the tenth century, it gave itself up to the King of France. Peace and war, reverses and prosperity, such was the record of Lyons for many succeeding centuries, but on the whole it was a condition of progress. In the days of the Revolution it suffered much, was partially, and would have been entirely destroyed, but for Robespierre's timely death. Since then it has enjoyed almost uninterrupted prosperity. Its silk manufactures alone approach the value of £20,000,000. Here Claudius was born, Marcus Aurelius, Caracalla and Geta, Irenæus, St. Ambrose, and many great men of modern times. But the present is represented by its commerce and manufactures; and of the past scarce a trace remains excepting this Church of St. Martin d'Aunay.

Its three doorways have pointed arches, and its central cupola is supported by four granite columns, supposed to consist of two ancient Roman columns cut in half. These columns are said to have belonged to the altar erected by the sixty Gallic tribes. The nave and double aisles are vaulted and supported by double columns. The church is small, but, as we have said, here we have a true atmosphere of the past, with distinctly Pagan and Christian traces. Here we are glad to take refuge from the commonplace streets of the town, the modern, prosy atmosphere, the hard, uncompromising outlines. Here one lingers and dreams; visions of Rome and Roman influence rise up before one. We stand in the centre of the Forum Vetus erected by Trajan—who built for the ages to come. We realise all the Christian persecutions of Marcus Aurelius, the still greater persecutions of Severus. We pass into the dungeons, and there we see Blandina closing the eyes of Pothinus in death, herself calm and serene, sustained by divine strength. We hear the roar of the wild beasts in the amphitheatre, and see a stream of martyrs, "perfected through suffering," passing to the Life Beyond. Here in this little church we are enveloped in a magic atmosphere; are steeped in the whole influence of the past; scenes rise up before the mental vision vividly as though actually existing. Surely the whole building is peopled with shades of martyrs, with those who took part in those scenes, who are whispering in the ear and influencing the mind. It would almost seem so; for whenever we returned to the building, we immediately fell into a delicious trance of the past.

We had come to Lyons, as we have said, with the wish to go down the Rhone by boat, hoping to be able to break our journey at various places, and take perhaps a week in the transit. This we found to be impossible. Boats ran seldom in this autumn of the year, they started at unearthly hours, before daylight, in cold and misty mornings; there would be much discomfort and little pleasure in carrying out the idea. In fact it was practically impossible, and we reserved it for some future occasion. Therefore we changed our plans, or rather circumstance changed them for us.

And now for a moment, and for the first and only time, we abandoned the lovely Valley of the Rhone, and took a cross country train through Central France, to a place we had long wished to see: Le Puy, in the volcanic region of the Velay, the romantic and little-



CATHEDRAL CLOISTERS.

known district of Auvergne with its extinct volcanoes, the sharp eccentric and pointed outlines of its hills.

We left Lyons one sunny afternoon, glad to escape from its prosy atmosphere, in which we desired to have neither part nor lot. For a time the atmosphere was hardly a change for the better. That journey has left upon us the influence of a dream, and partly of a

nightmare. We quickly passed into the regions of coal mines and factories. The train ran through a valley in which everything was black as Erebus: scenes worthy of Pandemonium. Yet there was a weird fascination about it. Tall chimneys sent forth dense volumes of smoke; tongues of flame shot forth from innumerable furnaces. The workmen going to and fro looked like veritable imps incarnate.

As daylight faded, the effect was even more startling. It was a black world, with fiery furnaces seven-times heated. The line is the oldest in France, and the small stations we came to looked dirty and antiquated. But there had been a fair or fête in that part of the country, and presently we found the stations crammed to suffocation with a crowd that fought and surged and clambered for seats. Not a tithe of them could find room. No respect was paid to compartments whether 1st, 2nd or 3rd. With a railway-key we managed to keep our own fairly free: but as fate would have it, at the last moment, up came the guard at St. Chamond, opened the door, and let in a flood of cattle-drovers. It was a terrible experience. The men seemed hardly human; they shouted and raved, as men of that class do; it is their natural tone; they spoke a language that was perfectly unintelligible; once or twice we thought they were going to commit murder, but nothing was further from their intention. We longed for the end, but the end was long in coming. Three parts of the people certainly never reached home that night, for the company had not made the smallest extra provision for them. They must have remained in the stations or wandered disconsolately about the neighbourhood.

St. Etienne was passed with its enormous area of coal-fields, yielding some 4,000,000 tons a year. Side by side with these coal-fields, with great works showing their fiery furnaces and factories where they make firearms, are immense ribbon manufactories, so that they say in the neighbourhood: "*Les ateliers de Mars se trouvent à côté de ceux de Vénus.*"

Darkness fell, and we lost all the characteristic scenery through which we travelled. It was very late when at last we reached Le Puy, glad to be at our journey's end. The hotel omnibus was in waiting and we had it to ourselves. In Lyons we had been very strongly recommended to go to the Hôtel des Diplomates and did so, but were afterwards told it was not the best.

Whether best or not, it was a curious rambling old place. The omnibus passed under a porte cochère that was half a tunnel, and finally issued on to a small courtyard. A short flight of steps led to the hotel proper, and at the top of the steps the stalwart landlord loomed upon us like another Goliath. The first appearance of the inn was not very much in its favour, and no after impression corrected it. The long passages had very little light in them, the old wood staircase had no carpet. It was a cold night, and the wind seemed to whistle through cracks and crevices, and played fantastic tricks



AN OLD NOOK; ST. MICHEL D'AGUILHE IN BACKGROUND.

with the candle flame as the man shuffled up-stairs in slip-shod slippers with the baggage. Madame was still in her bureau, where alone was warmth and comfort. But madame was erect and preparing to disappear for the night. Vigil she informed us was bad for the complexion, though madame was past the age when French women as a rule possess it. The train had never been so late, thanks to the fêtes and the crowds. Our rooms were large, but rather bare, cold and comfortless. It was not altogether the fault of the rooms, but partly the effect of the midnight hour, and of our long wretched journey, alighting finally in a freezing atmosphere under the night stars. We found refuge and refreshment in the *salle à manger*, where a sleepy solitary waiter by the light of a solitary and gloomy lamp served us with warm tea, that in spite of a strong flavour of hot water and chopped hay, we received with gratitude. There is nothing like it for restoring cheerfulness to the jaded spirit—especially when you get it good. Our dreams that night were haunted by unruly crowds rushing into Pandemoniums. Now we inhabited a sable world, and now were surrounded by a thousand fiery furnaces shooting out tongues of flame, which vainly tried to reach us and from which we as vainly tried to escape.

Next morning we woke to broad sunshine and blue skies. The darkness of night and the freezing atmosphere were of the past. We took heart of grace, leaped out of bed and opened wide the windows. Fresh, delicious air came in as a morning tonic, incense-breathing, exhilarating. We gazed upon slanting red roofs, with ancient tiles and dormer windows. Below was the courtyard, and the omnibus was still there. This morning it all looked a quaint, picturesque bower, creeper-laden. We went down to our coffee, and found last night's sleepy waiter very much brightened up by his late rest. He hoped we had had *une bonne nuit* and that *ces messieurs* would find much that was interesting in Le Puy.

This we soon proceeded to put to the test. Le Puy has much that is disappointing, and a very great deal to repay a visit. It falls below its reputation; all the songs in prose and verse that have been sung in its honour; yet possesses charms and attractions difficult to rival or to find elsewhere. The first impression of the town is almost unpleasant. The streets near the hotels are modern and commonplace, with only here and there a redeeming feature in the shape of an ancient building that has escaped the hands of the despoiler. At the first movement our spirits went down to zero. Had we left the Valley of the Rhone only for this?

It is in the upper town that the charm lies, which is gained by steep, narrow, tortuous streets by no means famous for cleanliness. When you have thoroughly climbed into the old town, you are well rewarded. Signs of antiquity surround you. Ancient houses gabled and picturesque; whole groups of wonderful tenements whose latticed windows have let in the light of centuries. Some have fallen into

decay; others are far on the road to it: and, alas, many are undergoing restoration. Nothing lasts for ever: and as very much of the picturesque age was of one period, so now we have reached a general stage of decay and restoration. All over Europe, go where you will, you are met by a network of scaffolding, by signs and tokens of demolition. It is heart-breaking but no doubt inevitable. Future



TEMPLE OF DIANA.

generations must find their outlines in books, and travel to the Nurembergs, the Vitrés, the Dantzics of the world in their arm-chairs.

We made for the cathedral, in its way a very singular and striking building. It is visible long before we reach it, as we climb the steep and narrow street that confronts the west entrance. We look up to what seems a dazzling height. The steep street ends in a grand wide

staircase, which is continued under the great vaulted porch. Things here are not now as they were. Once upon a time the staircase, now blocked by a dead wall, went straight on, crossed the pavement of the nave and ended at the transept immediately in front of the choir. The effect must have been striking and magnificent, full of religious impression. From the steps outside it has been said that the far-off officiating priest could be seen before the altar. Thousands of pilgrims came to the shrine of the Black Image.

The church is a very fine specimen of Romanesque work. Its west front is peculiar: a mixture of black and white, red and yellow stones arranged in patterns. But, it has been scraped and renewed; and there is a certain chess-board effect about it that is hard and crude. It must once have been far finer than it is now, with its cold sharp outlines and pencillings. The great west portal is of the twelfth century, and the space beneath might itself form a small church. The vaulting under which we stand is the flooring of the nave.

The doorway has two striking columns of red porphyry. The great portal has three semicircular arches opening to the porch: above it is some smaller arcading. The west front taken as a whole is almost Byzantine in effect.

The interior possesses a nave and aisles, and in the twelfth century the nave was covered with six Byzantine domes, which are effective from the exterior. There is a lantern over the centre of the small transept, galleries, small double chapels and a square choir. The general effect is plain and massive.

Upon the high altar is a black image of the Virgin, supposed to work miracles. It is modern, and takes the place of one that was destroyed by the sacrilegious revolutionists: a very ancient black image, also working miracles, and supposed to have been carved by Jeremiah and brought to Europe at the time of the Crusades. But we may be allowed to doubt whether Jeremiah ever devoted any time to carving black images. The cathedral has a very striking and beautiful south-east porch, dating back to the twelfth century, elaborately ornamented with sculpture. The detached transitional clock-tower at the east end has seven diminishing stages with Romanesque and pointed arches. This is also twelfth century. The exterior, with its towers and domes, looked down upon from above, is remarkable.

The cloisters are most interesting, and some of the most ancient in France. These unfortunately have also been restored, and the process was still going on, so that they looked very fresh in their new dress. They are oblong, with round arches supported by stone piers and granite columns, with the capitals in white stone. Portions of this cloister date back to the eighth century. On the west side, is a building with machicolations, the remains of a thirteenth century fortress.

Continuing upwards from the cathedral, we ascended the Rocher

de Corneille, a volcanic mass nearly 500 feet above the town, and 2,500 above the level of the sea. Rude steps cut out of the rock form a Jacob's ladder to the summit. This is crowned by an enormous gilt image of Notre Dame de France 52 feet high, made out of 200 Russian cannons taken at Sebastopol.



ST. MICHEL D'AIGUILHE.

The view from the Rocher is superb. We gaze over vast and undulating plains. There are innumerable vine-clad hills, whilst here and there a sharp volcanic peak proclaims the origin of its existence. It is a boundless, exquisite scene. Immediately below us are the steep streets and red roofs of the town; but there has been too much renovation and the tone is disappointing.

Descending the long flight of steps, passing the cathedral, and getting back into the town we found ourselves in a wonderfully picturesque nook. Before us was an ancient octagonal building said to be a Temple of Diana, but more probably a Christian church built by the Templars. The roof rests on columns, and the alternate sides have Moresque arches. It was a small, beautiful and ancient gem. Near it, in the open thoroughfare, was an old and splendid cross, which stood out with striking effect.

Going round amidst the old houses, stared at by the old women who came to their doors in wonderful old caps, reaching the lower town and passing out of it, we reached one of the most interested objects of Le Puy: the huge needle rock crowned by the church of St. Michel-d'Aiguille.

Nearly three hundred stairs, cut out of the rock lead to the summit. At the foot of these was an old woman making lace, guardian of the keys. She looked interesting in her white cap with her pillow upon her knees, where the bobbins flew about in the most miraculous manner. Her small house of two rooms was close by.

"I have hard work to keep the pot-au-feu," she said, as we watched the flying bobbins. "They don't give me much for keeping the keys of the church up there; so I have to fall back upon making lace. But it is a poor living; there is too much competition; a whole army of lace-making women; we are 100,000 strong. If monsieur has not visited the Salle des dentelles, he must do so. There he will find every variety of the lace of the country."

So talking she compelled us to buy some of her handiwork, and then confided to us the keys of the church.

"I will come with you if you like," she said. "But my old legs have got almost beyond that Jacob's ladder. And if you will lock the door and bring back the keys, you will be better without me. There is nothing to explain up there. It is not like a cathedral where the Suisse goes round and delivers himself of a whole chapter of history, half of which is probably all imagination."

We took the keys and gladly dispensed with her escort. A formidable Jacob's ladder it looked in truth as we gazed upwards at the huge needle rock. There were nearly three hundred steps to ascend; no wonder the old woman avoided them. Nevertheless it was a very interesting climb. The higher we went, the more the view expanded: the vast plain surrounded us; the vine-clad hills; the town at our feet, with its red roofs and steep and narrow streets; the Rocher de Corneille, which almost overshadowed us with its irritating colossal figure at the summit.

On reaching the end of our pilgrimage, we were well rewarded. Before us stood the wonderful little church forming, as it were, part of the rock itself. This alone, without anything else, would well repay a visit to Le Puy. The exterior was full of exquisite detail: Romanesque with a Byzantine feeling and influence about it. A



SIDE ENTRANCE TO CATHEDRAL.

short flight of steps led to the old doorway with its quaint bas-reliefs flanked by two pillars with gracefully carved capitals. Above this rose a profusion of decoration: a series of small round arches enclosed in one broad arch, above which was an arcade of blind Romanesque arches. The whole was crowned by a wonderful roof of red tiles. Perched up here, like Mahomet's coffin, between heaven and earth, it seemed miraculous.

Yet lovely as was the exterior, the true marvel was the interior, like unto nothing we had ever seen, of most original design. There was so much system in its oval irregular plan that small as it was—not larger than an ordinary room—there were at least five distinct and separate views, each of which would have made a charming picture. We had no drawing materials with us, but never doubted that we should obtain photographs of it in the town: yet no one had ever had the enterprise to take the interior.

It was perfect in its details and arrangements: an aisle with pillars and pointed arches that ran round in circle, narrowing at the end. This enclosed the little circular nave, as it might be called, capable of holding a dozen chairs. There was a small altar table at the east end. It was a building to dream about and to haunt. We felt we should like to linger here for hours and days; return again and again. There was a subtle indescribable charm about it: the charm of a thousand years—for it dates back to the year 962. The light entered through small windows. There was an exquisite tone over all. On the point of leaving, we turned back over and over again; and seldom had we finally turned away from any building great or small, with more reluctance.

"I thought you were never coming down again," said the old woman, as we handed her the keys, "and began to wonder whether you had tumbled over the rock and made the return journey rather too quickly. I suppose, monsieur, you admired the little church—or perhaps it was the view that attracted you?"

"The little church has no rival," we replied. "Do not others say so?"

"I never hear much praise of it," she returned: "but we don't have so very many visitors. Half the English who come can't talk six words of French, and those who can never stop to say a word to me. They just throw me the keys and a 10 centime piece, and perhaps a *Bonjour*, and away they go. Now monsieur is *sympathique* and not above a few words of conversation with the old lace-maker. Our lives would be much pleasanter if it were always so."

We laughed at the old woman's implied compliment, and felt that she was wise in her generation: a woman of tact.

On our way back into the old town we entered the interesting fourteenth century church of St. Laurent. Here we found the tomb and statue of the famous du Guesclin, the greatest French general of the fourteenth century: of whom it is recorded that he was so dull a boy

that he could never be taught to read or write. Yet his fame survives. We know how he was present at the Battle of Poitiers when King John was taken prisoner; was himself taken prisoner by Sir John Chandos at the Battle of Auray; was again defeated by the Black Prince when he had marched against Pedro the Cruel of Castile; finally defeated and slew Pedro and was made Constable of Castile. Charles V. recalled him, made him Constable of France, and in the campaigns of 1370 against the English he was utterly successful. His tomb and statue threw a halo of historical romance over the old church, for du Guesclin had been beloved and admired by friends and enemies alike.

We wandered back into the steep old streets of the upper town. Every step, every winding and turning disclosed some picturesque and ancient house or group of houses. From one large house at a corner, two sisters of mercy came out, with huge white caps that stretched half a yard beyond their faces. They are certainly picturesque, but must be very uncomfortable. The two sisters looked wonderfully telling and effective as they crossed the street against the background of houses black with the smoke and "devastating dust" of centuries. As they came up to us we ventured to ask them to what order they belonged.

"St. Vincent de Paul," one of them replied; "and they went about nursing the sick, helping the poor; sometimes turning into the schools and giving a hand to the teachers. Wherever they could be useful, there they went. *Ces messieurs* were strange to the place?"

We replied that we were mere birds of passage; here to-day and gone to-morrow.

"Very much like our own lives," said the sister, who spoke in rather a sweet and gentle voice. "To-day we flourish like the green grass; to-morrow we are cut down, dried up and withered. Not that we wish to be depressing," she laughed—a gentle laugh it is true, but still a laugh. "We hope, monsieur, you have found Le Puy interesting?"

"Both interesting and disappointing," we answered. "It seems to us essentially the place for spring and summer, not for late autumn. We must return to it when the leaves are green."

"And the birds are in song," she added, "and there is golden sunshine over all."

Talking we walked up the street together; the sisters paused before an old doorway. "If you are fond of ancient outlines, come in here," she said. "You will be pleased."

She turned a handle and passing down a passage led us to an old fifteenth century Gothic courtyard. It was not very large, but it was exquisitely beautiful: a gem of the world. A small cloistered passage ran round it, the arches supported by slender pillars with capitals of delicately carved foliage. From these sprang the groins of the vaulted roof. Nothing had been touched or restored; effect and

tone were perfect. Above the cloister ran a blind Gothic arcade and above this, here and there in the dark grey wall, was an old window with deep Gothic mullions. As a set off against this charm of a dead-and-gone world, in the centre of the courtyard there flourished a group of trees and flowers more green and brilliant than we could have imagined in dilapidated old Le Puy, with its terrible streets and unsavoury odours. Above all was the blue sky and the cold autumn sunshine.

"I knew you would be pleased," said the nun, noting our unbounded admiration. "This now belongs to a private house, but it was once part of an old convent. By some happy chance it has escaped demolition."

"It is the gem of Le Puy—of the whole province," we cried. "And but for you we should not have seen it."

"Nobody ever sees it," returned the sister. "It is difficult to find; there is nothing to indicate its existence. Strangers come and go, and pass the door ten times, and never even dream of what they are losing. Had you not spoken to us, you also would never have seen it, as you observe. It is not one person in five hundred who ever addresses a word to us. I think our caps frighten them, just as scarecrows in the fields frighten the birds."

"Or perhaps they think that you are vowed to silence and it would be lost labour to make a remark?" we suggested.

"Oh, for that matter," laughed the sister, "we are women; and amongst ourselves we talk and chatter, and try to make this weary world as pleasant to one another as we can."

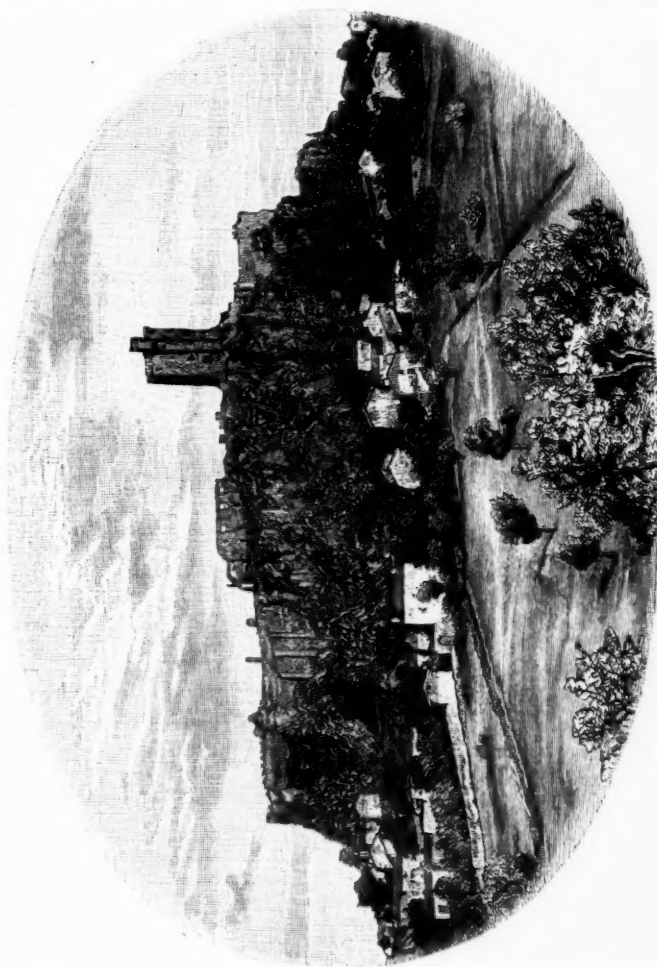
We parted from the sisters feeling we owed them a debt of gratitude. They passed into the house through a Gothic doorway at the end of the little cloister and disappeared.

We returned to the hotel and after luncheon, following madame's advice, took a drive to the ruined castle of Polignac, which lies three miles north-west of the town.

As we have said it was late in the season for Le Puy. Autumn in this district was too far advanced. The cold winds swept across the great plains and over the hills; vegetation languished and died. Yet the drive was very lovely. The road was often rugged and uneven; now we toiled upwards, round a volcanic hill, now descended into the valley with its rivers, and its pastures in which the cows browsed leisurely.

The ruined Château of Polignac, perched on its gigantic rock, is a conspicuous object throughout the vast plain. Our conveyance toiled up through the village as far as the old Romanesque church which goes back to the eleventh century. From that point we had to wind round the rock on foot to the entrance of the castle. The walls still surround it; walls of immense thickness; some of them double and treble walls, here and there flanked by a tower, a square donjon tower conspicuous above all.

Some portion of the building goes back to the eleventh century and the whole might still be standing, but for the destroying days of the Revolution. The castle was torn down and the lands were sold, and the de Polignacs found themselves shorn of



CHÂTEAU DE POLIGNAC.

their stronghold. But the day came when they were able to repurchase the ruin, though they could never again inhabit their despoiled inheritance.

We found it very interesting. The wonderful view over the

surrounding plains followed us everywhere. The woman who escorted us and opened the keep, had her lesson by heart.

"The de Polignacs were a great family," she declared, "and are so still, though they cannot any longer live in this old castle. I ought to know all about them if any one does, for we have been servants of the family and custodians for three hundred years. It has descended from father to son in an unbroken line."

She had a well-developed, intellectual head, this woman, and brown eyes clear as the heavens, and she was evidently no common character. But she was a little lame and deformed, which gave her a somewhat pathetic expression of countenance, so often seen in deformed people: as though they felt they had a continual cross in life, and had to take up their daily burden.

Her brother was custodian now, she informed us, pointing out his house inside the walls. Since he had married there was no room for her, so they had built her a little house all to herself: "the tiniest house of one room that ever was seen." She took us into it: a small room with everything white; a beautiful white bed in the corner; everything the very pink of perfection. On the table was a lace-pillow.

"Then you, too, make lace?" we asked.

"It is my living," she replied, as she displayed some very fine specimens. "Monsieur cannot do better than buy some for your ladies in England."

On the floor was a rude wooden cradle, and in it, tightly packed, a lovely child with blue eyes large as saucers. He had the same well-developed intelligent head, and much resembled her, excepting that her eyes were brown. As she looked at him, he laughed with that radiant smile which sometimes illumines the faces of children, making them almost angelic.

"You are married?" we asked.

"Oh, no," she returned quickly, blushing vividly. "This is my brother's child. But he stays here all day long with me whilst his mother is busy at her household work. If I never take him up, he never cries. He is as good as gold."

At this moment the mother appeared on the scene; a bright, comely woman, with large blue eyes the very counterpart of her baby's. She was charmed at the notice given to the infant, and when we complimented her upon the likeness between the two and the beauty of the blue orbs, she ran back to her house and her work with a blush and a gratified smile.

"Come and see the mask before you leave," said our guide. "The child will be all right; he will not cry or move; and there are no wolves here to come in and steal them away, heaven be praised."

Then she led the way, and presently showed us an enormous mask carved in granite, the mask of a bearded face.

"It is said that a Temple of Apollo was once here," she said,

"and that this mask was the mouthpiece of the oracle. Here," she added, moving on a few steps, "is the Puits de l'Oracle. The oracles were delivered through it. It is very deep, and there are all sorts of traditions connected with it. One was that the year it ran dry, the castle would be destroyed. For the first time it ran dry the year of the Revolution! But tradition is often prophecy. I believe it to be inspired."

The shadows were lengthening when we left the heights of Polignac to the safe custody of our interesting guide, who did not fail to accompany us to the great gates and speed us on our way with a hearty "*Bon voyage, messieurs. Revenez avec les beaux jours. Ici en hiver il fait un froid de loup.*"

We passed round the rock, and found our driver, who was evidently not a man of divided affections. Near the church was a cabaret, and the latter had received all his devotion, the church none of it. He settled his score, mounted his box, and in a few moments we were winding down through the antiquated, poverty-stricken village of Polignac until a turn brought us to the high road and the vineyards and the green pastures; and in the distance, perched on the top of the Rocher de Corneille, outlined against the clear, cold sky, the colossal image of Notre Dame de France stretched forth her golden arms towards us as though in perpetual benediction.

A STORM IN HARVEST.

IN the slow waning years of middle age

There have been days when to the heart has come

The thought—"Now life draws near its harvest-home.

One need not fear that any storm will rage

To wreck our crops in this their ripened stage.

Little is left now, save to gather up

The last full grapes, and press them in the cup,

And sum life's gains upon its latest page."

When lo! a storm breaks at our very door;

Our roof is rent, our sheaves are torn apart,

Our vintage lost. Then we to harvest-home,

With broken cup and empty hands, must come,

And sit us down among the Master's poor;

But lo! that seat is nearest to His heart.

ISABELLA FVIE MAYO.

PHARAOH'S CURSE.

BY LUCIAN SORREL.

I.

WHEN I left the London Hospital, I entered the service of the Red Flag Steamship Company, as surgeon on their boat, the *Arab*. It was during my second voyage that I fell in with Dr. Felsbrigger, the celebrated Egyptologist, whose name is known and honoured in every country of Europe.

The Doctor is, of course, an old traveller, and long before most of the passengers who set out from Suez had recovered from *mal de mer*, he and I were on terms of considerable intimacy. One night we were smoking our after-dinner cigars together on the hurricane deck, when he confided to me the object of his return to England.

"You must have noticed with some surprise," he said, "that among the many treasures contained in the cabin I have engaged for their transport, is a huge coffin-like box. Possibly you may have guessed that it contains an Egyptian mummy; though of the value of the contents you can have no idea. That box holds all that is mortal of the great Pharaoh, Ammon-Nekab."

The Professor paused for a moment; perhaps to see the effect of this announcement; perhaps in doubt whether to take me further into his confidence. At last he continued:

"I need hardly tell you that I did not gain this prize without considerable trouble. It was difficult, in the first place, to find out where the mummy was hidden; and even when I had discovered its location, the natives of the district would not hear of its removal. It appears that there is some curious legend extant, to the effect that Pharaoh believed that he would live again at the expiration of some thousands of years——"

"Like King Arthur, for instance," I suggested.

"Yes—and like Charlemagne. Well, in this hope Ammon-Nekab is said to have had his coffin filled with treasure, in order that he might not revisit the world empty-handed. Doubtless this report would have tempted the cupidity of the natives many centuries back, had it not been for the terrible curse pronounced by Pharaoh against anyone who interfered with his remains. You are aware, of course, of the extraordinary and superstitious terror all the Pharaohs had lest their bodies should see corruption. In this case the singular belief of the dead monarch appears to have increased his terrors tenfold, and his curse is said to doom anyone who disturbs his last resting-place to a speedy and agonising death. One man, and one only, say

the natives, has dared to risk his displeasure. This was three hundred years ago, when Elizabeth was reigning in England; and tradition says that the man fell a victim to his foolhardiness. I only give you the story for what it is worth. The portrait, and the inscriptions on the exterior of the coffin, speedily assured me that the remains were really those of Ammon-Nekab, and the wealth of which I am fortunately possessed soon enabled me to overcome the scruples of the natives—though I doubt whether any local Egyptian insurance office, if such existed, would set a very high valuation on my life. But perhaps you would like to see the coffin more closely than you have yet done?”

We made our way below, to the spare cabin next his own in which the Professor kept his Egyptian treasures; and in a few moments I was standing before this most interesting relic of the past. The huge coffin was completely covered with hieroglyphics, save where the face and figure of the deceased monarch were portrayed in still vivid colours.

“I am unable to show you more at present,” said the Professor, when I had spent some time in examining the coffin, “but immediately on my arrival in England I intend to have it opened in the presence of the foremost savants of the day, and I shall be glad if you can be my guest on that occasion.”

A stay of two or three days in London before journeying northward to my home exactly suited my convenience; and I gladly accepted Dr. Felsbrigger's invitation. During the remainder of the voyage our friendship by no means diminished; in fact, we were usually together whenever my professional duties did not demand my presence elsewhere.

Two rather singular occurrences disturbed the remainder of our voyage. One was the theft of Lady Lovett's jewels, which were stolen from their case in her cabin, though all efforts to trace the thief proved futile. The other was the supposed suicide of a job-hand who had come on board at Suez. The night before our arrival at the Docks, as we were nearing the mouth of the river, Dr. Felsbrigger and I were leaning over the bridge of the vessel, watching the play of the green portlight on the foaming waters, when we heard a splash, and noticed at the same time a dark body cleaving the water. The cry “Man overboard” went round at once; a life-belt was thrown out, and a boat lowered; but they searched for the body in vain. Inquiries proved afterwards that the man Lloyd was missing.

But both those catastrophes were forgotten in the excitement of landing the next morning, and the novelty of driving once more through London streets to Dr. Felsbrigger's house in Park Lane.

II.

"Did you sleep well last night?" asked the Professor, when I appeared at breakfast. "My man Reynolds tells me some absurd story about old Ammon-Nekab roaming the house over while we were all asleep, and swears that he heard him getting out of his coffin and banging about among the furniture. Reynolds is more or less given to superstition, and he says that he was too frightened to turn out and interview the monarch, and so stayed in bed, with the blankets over his head. I rather fancy that keyhole listening may have had something to do with his dreams. Have some more coffee? No? Then suppose we adjourn to the library for a quiet pipe? You won't mind my putting a few finishing touches to my paper before my guests arrive?"

Letters had been sent from one of our ports of call to the leading scientists and antiquarians of the day, inviting them to be present, during this Saturday afternoon to witness the opening of the coffin. Soon after luncheon they began to arrive, and I found myself the only nonentity in a company that included many of our most famous men.

The huge coffin was on trestles in the centre of the drawing-room, and Dr. Felsbrigger seated himself conveniently near it, with his carefully prepared manuscript spread out on a baize-covered table before him. As soon as all were seated, he cleared his throat, and commenced to read his paper, the greater part of which had been prepared during the voyage. Hitherto I had known the Doctor solely as a modest and unaffected friend, and as a hospitable and genial host. I now saw the man of science, the antiquarian, the author whose articles in the reviews, and whose less ephemeral contributions to modern literature are known to every reader of culture.

Dealing first with the history of other famous mummies, he worked the subject skilfully round to his discovery of this, the mummy of Ammon-Nekab; a veritable Koh-i-Nor among mummies, of more interest to the scientific world than all the produce of Golconda. He described his difficulties, from the outset of the expedition to his return to London, and his triumph over the customs, who were induced to pass the coffin unopened, gave the gist of the hieroglyphics on the case, and pointed out the value of the discovery, both in regard to the history of the Pharaohs, and to Egyptian and Biblical chronology, always a matter of dispute among antiquarians.

His peroration moved to admiration even those among his audience who did not agree with his deductions. Placing one hand on the coffin, he pointed out, in a voice tremulous with emotion, the interest that would attach to the discovery, even had the mummy been that of the meanest of Ammon-Nekab's subjects—interest that all must feel in seeing before them in a perfect state of preservation the body of one who had lived and moved and had his being in the early childhood of the world.

"But the body, my lords and gentlemen," he continued, "is the body of a monarch, of a great monarch, ruler over a great people, of a monarch whose slightest wish was law, whose power over his subjects was boundless, whose only conqueror and only master was death. Think, gentlemen, of the days in which Pharaoh lived; of the pomp and ceremony by which he was surrounded; of the long ago in which this parched form beside us was full of warm, human life, ready for the chase of the lion on the desert sands that have shrouded him these many centuries; ready for battle amid his glittering legions; ready for evening dallying with dark-eyed beauties on the bosom of old Nile, or in sumptuous palaces, lulled by the strains of softest music. Since then, dynasties have risen and fallen, nations have waxed and waned, young men and maidens, strong men and matrons, have acted out their little parts on the world's stage, have loved, and fought, and laughed, and wept, and put on finery, and donned the garb of mourning, as if their little day were the only one in the history of this old, old world, and so have passed out into the darkness. It is we who are privileged to brush aside the dust of all these ages, to view the object round which so many legends have clustered, to behold that which the eyes of Egyptian workmen, closed long ages in death, were the last to see."

As Dr. Felsbrigger finished his paper, Reynolds advanced to the centre of the room, and assisted his master to raise the lid of the coffin. For a moment there was breathless silence; then all rushed forward to see what was to be seen."

What was the meaning of that sudden cry of disappointment, that look of blank dismay? I peered into the dark recesses of the coffin, and saw there—nothing, nothing, save only a slip of yellow parchment!

Dr. Felsbrigger was completely unmanned; while sympathy, elation, doubt, surprise, were to be seen on the faces of his rivals and colleagues.

"The body was there yesterday, of that I am certain," the Professor exclaimed, as soon as he recovered his voice. "The weight of the thing alone would have been sufficient to tell me that."

"Possibly Ammon-Nekab has come to life again, as he predicted," someone suggested. I noticed that Reynolds shook his head solemnly in approval of this remark,

"Wouldn't it be better to read the parchment before we hazard any solutions?" I suggested. Dr. Felsbrigger unrolled the little yellow scrap, and he and his colleagues puzzled diligently over it for some minutes. Then they read out its meaning, which in rough-and-ready English was as follows;

"I, Pharaoh Ammon-Nekab, Lord of the Upper and Lower Lands, (give) warning to the strangers that follow. Know by the word of Osiris that I shall live again; and the death of the beast shall be to those that touch my body."

"That bears out the legend, certainly," said Dr. Felsbrigger, "but

it doesn't throw much light on existing circumstances. However, we must put up for the present with our disappointment. In the meantime, Sir Stanley Briggs, I may as well show you and any others who care to see them, my collections of coins and antiquities, which I believe you were anxious to examine."

The Professor led the way to his museum, and held open the door while one by one we filed into the room. Here another terrible surprise was awaiting us.

The Museum was in a state of pitiful confusion, with boxes, cabinets and drawers heaped together in a broken mass upon the floor; while of the magnificent collections of jewellery, antiquities, and gold and silver coins, scarcely a specimen remained! Of course the police were at once communicated with, but it did not seem at all likely that their efforts to trace the stolen property would be successful. It was a mystery to us how the robbery could have been planned and carried out so easily, though we naturally associated the disappearance of Ammon-Nekab with the loss.

I felt that under the circumstances my visit could not be prolonged; and the next morning I bade my kind host adieu, with an earnestly expressed hope that the property might soon be recovered. He shook his head mournfully.

"I'm afraid that's too much to expect," he said, "but at least we can hope that Ammon-Nekab's curse may take effect on the person who has disturbed the remains."

He spoke half jestingly, little thinking how soon his words were to be realised. As I stepped into my hansom, a woman rushed up to the house, and asked eagerly for Dr. Nicholls.

"Wait a minute, Nicholls; this seems to be a case for you," said the Professor, "though how anyone knew you were here is beyond me."

The woman, who was trembling with nervousness and excitement, told me in a few words that a lodger of hers was dying in great agony and had asked for me. I repeated the address she gave me to the cabman; he urged his horse into a rattling pace, and twenty minutes later we alighted at a little alley in the thick of the densest and lowest slums in the West End of London.

The man's room was right at the top of the building, up several flights of rickety stairs; and I could hear his cries and groans long before we reached the apartment.

"The curse is killing me! The curse is killing me!" he shrieked, as we entered the room. "Cut off my arm—tear the wound out! It burns, it burns!" the poor wretch screamed in his agony, writhing with pain until the bedstead shook beneath his weight; and trying himself to pluck the flesh from the injured limb. I examined the wound of which he complained, and found that it was a small jagged cut or scratch on the left arm. The appearance of the wound, and the swollen state of the arm, showed me that some very

malignant poison must have been injected; and I sent the woman with a prescription to the nearest chemist. During her absence the man, who gradually grew calmer, but seemed so certain of his impending death that he unburdened his mind to me quite freely, related a most singular and almost incredible story.

From his early youth, which he had spent in New York, he had been used to all varieties of crime; had knocked about in every quarter of the globe; and had finally drifted to Suez, "the wickedest little place on earth," as it has not without reason been called. Here he took ship in the *Arab* for London, with no definite plan of campaign, save a resolution to take advantage of anything that might turn up. On board he stole Lady Lovett's jewels; and in doubt where to put his ill-gotten gains, hit upon the expedient of concealing them in the capacious coffin of the dead Pharaoh. This suggested to him later on in the voyage an ingenious though dangerous plan. He happened to overhear the story of Pharaoh's treasure; he also knew of Dr. Felsbrigger's enormous wealth. He made all his arrangements carefully beforehand, even down to boring minute holes for ventilation in the coffin; and on the night before our arrival in London carried his plan into execution, by shooting the shrivelled body of the monarch into the sea, and concealing himself, with a supply of provisions, Lady Lovett's jewels, and Pharaoh's treasure, in the coffin. Once in Dr. Felsbrigger's drawing-room, all was plain sailing; he ransacked the museum of the coins and jewellery, all of which could be easily disposed of; replaced the lid of the coffin, after abstracting the treasure contained in it; and leaving the drawing-room untouched, in order that he might gain a few hours' start, sought a hiding-place in the heart of London.

But Nemesis, the result of the dead Egyptian's curse, followed him. In getting out of the coffin, it appears that he tore his arm slightly against a projecting nail; and this produced a wound of which, shortly after my visit, he died.

Dr. Felsbrigger supposes that Pharaoh, in order that his curse might be no dead letter, caused the coffin to be impregnated with a deadly poison. In the course of ages the potency of this had almost vanished; but the piercing of the skin had injected some into the blood of the man, and had thus caused his death. The theory may seem absurd; but of course, in a case like this, one is only able to conjecture. The fact remains that the man died, the avenging arm of Pharaoh reaching him thus across forty centuries; though Professor Felsbrigger himself has taken no harm as yet from the many and valuable mementoes of the dead monarch that his collection now boasts.



BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY six o'clock the storm was over, the thunder had ceased to murmur even in the far distance, and the light shone through the clouds on a world shimmering with diamond drops.

It was time to start on the long ride homewards ; but alas ! little was left of the gaiety and merriment of the brilliant procession that had arrived at noon. The women were tired and frightened ; over the men had come a strange gloom, and they whispered to each other all sorts of wild and fanciful tales. One vowed that he had seen flames of fire issuing from the grey cat's mouth, which lit up Nell's face till it shone brightly. Another swore that dark forms had spoken to her from the water, and waving arms had beckoned to her from the reeds. Some said that low whisperings had been heard in the corners of the hall and a laugh shrill and loud had rung out in the thunder-peal ; and others muttered angrily that when they left home in the morning the sky was clear as glass, and storms from heaven burst not from the blue.

So that there was gloom and discomfiture on the faces of the escort, and the young knight himself looked thoughtful as he placed his mother on her horse, sorrowing to think how white and weary she looked.

Nell herself strove to smile with bright pleasure when her young lord placed her on her own white horse. But the creature itself had probably been scared by the storm, for it reared and plunged and well-nigh unseated her ; so that for a while Ralph walked beside her leading and soothing him, and when she persuaded him to mount himself, he would not do so until stubborn Joe had taken his place and led the beautiful beast by the rein.

Nell strove hard to regain her spirits, but the tears would well up to her eyes, for she felt deeply, leaving behind her all that was left of her

home and childhood, her well-loved old nurse. The old woman had remained hidden all through the day. At the last moment she had crept into her own room and would not show herself even to bid farewell to her darling, so that Nell looking wistfully back could see nothing of the face she loved so well, and it made her heart ache.

The ride was very long. Lady Stourton was too weary to talk, save that now and then she spoke some gentle loving words that made Nell's heart glow with love to her. The young knight, too, was dull and preoccupied. The sullen looks of his retinue affected him, and he railed inwardly at the curious capriciousness of their temper, and gave way to a moody silence, for which he blamed himself. Then shaking it off he would put his hand on Nell's and look into her soft eyes, and the gloom would disperse, and he would once more look upon himself as the happiest man on earth.

At length when the evening had merged into early night and a calm moon mounted the dark blue vault of heaven and sailed through clouds now fleecy and soft as wool, they arrived at Stourton Castle. Every line of its architecture was marked with light, for in every torch-ring blazed a smoking torch and the windows were illuminated from within.

Before the door were assembled merry groups of villagers from the country round. Maidens and children threw leaves and flowers before the horses, and there was dancing, and singing, and cheering, and the gay waving to and fro of torches and bright-coloured lanterns.

The white horse again grew restive and reared dangerously, so that as they approached he was led by Joe on one side and the young knight on the other.

Lady Stourton dismounted first, and as she stood holding the hand of her son's young wife while he proudly led her forward, the assembled crowd broke into lusty English cheering, the shouts lasting so long and so loud that Sir Ralph waved his plumed hat and strove to speak several times before they would stop to hear him, and all the joyousness of youth and happiness seemed to surround him.

As the cheering filled the air, in the open doorway appeared another apparition. Mistress Isobel, magnificently attired in green and gold-flowered brocade and with jewels braided in her black hair, came forward with outstretched hands. She bent before Lady Stourton to receive her greeting and went up to Ralph her cousin. He, turning in impetuous joy, kissed her hand and placed it in that of his young wife.

Those who afterwards described the scene, swore that never had Mistress Isobel looked so well or so handsome, a scarlet colour bloomed on lip and cheek, and her eyes shone. Yet they shuddered as they told that when the fair young bride in her dazzling whiteness turned to her, and bending forward pressed her lips to her cheek—

it seemed as if a blight passed over Isobel, and there, before all the people, she gave a strange cry that was shrill and terrible, unlike any cry they had ever heard before, and fell heavily to the ground, writhing in such convulsions that the foam gathered on her lips; and the women rushed to her, surrounding her, with cries of fear and pity.

Nell clung to her husband's arm, for—for the first time in her life a qualm of deadly fear came over her, and as his arm pressed her closely to him, he felt that she was trembling violently. Angrily he pushed aside the crowd, and half led and half carried her into the house, where his mother, very weary and worn, had already seated herself.

"Isobel has again some strange fit upon her," said Ralph impatiently. "The women are bringing her in. Sweet mother, of your kindness take this tired child to her own rooms, and let her rest. It has sorely frightened her."

"Nay," Nell said, over-mastering her fears. "Let me go to your cousin and try to find some remedy. This attack has been brought on by over-great excitement and she will need soothing."

But Ralph would not allow it, neither would he rest until he had seen his mother and his wife safe in quiet and retirement together, leaving him at liberty to return downstairs to order due entertainment for all who had welcomed them that night.

All was merriment and joyousness when the young knight bade them go round to the courtyard, when casks were broached, and the cooks ran to and fro setting food before them. The oldest villager sang an ancient song, in the chorus of which all joined, and wine flowed freely, while the cooks brought out the meat steaming on the spits and carved it on great wooden platters under the calm light of the moon, and the red flare of the torches which filled the air with their resinous smoke.

And so in jollity and merriment all strove to drive away the sinister impressions made on many of them that day. But somehow it was all in vain; gay and loud as they would fain have been, they dropped asunder and in little knots together, whispered all the strange rumours and fancies of their minds, and one would furtively look over his shoulder, and another would cross himself. Then suddenly an old white-headed man struck a few notes on a rude lute which he wore slung from his shoulders and said loudly:

"I will sing you a song, my masters, and pray you right manfully to join in the chorus and make it ring joyfully."

And with a loud and singularly musical voice he began to sing the following words, so that all the company ceased their talk and listened to him willingly:

"Merrily, merrily sound the horn
And sing the roundelay—
We started forth on a summer morn
To bring the bride away!

Over the forest, over the vale
We rode to bring her here—
Over the forest, in bridal veil,
Queen of the silver mere!
Hurrah!

Merrily, merrily drink and sing,
Welcome to groom and bride;
Merrily, lads, let your glasses ring
To toast them side by side!
The wild moon rides through the stormy sky,
Hurrah for groom and bride!
The black clouds race, the white clouds fly
As through the woods we ride.
Hurrah!

Merrily, merrily sound the horn
And sing the roundelay—
We started forth this summer morn,
And have brought the bride away!
For weal or woe we have brought her home,
We greet our lady here,
Whether through storm or sunshine come—
Queen of the silver mere!
Hurrah! "

A storm of applause followed the song, and ere the vibration of the ringing cheers ceased, some instinct made the revellers rise to their feet and turn one way, to see that their young lord was standing among them.

Ralph Stourton was a man of few words, but something moved him to speak to these simple folk to-night, some strong impulse which prompted him to make an effort to secure to himself and his young bride the allegiance of these rude natives.

"My friends, my good friends," he began, "I thank you earnestly and from my heart for the welcome you have given to my bride. I have brought her home among you, a stranger, hitherto unknown to you except by hearsay, and that hearsay" (his voice rang out like a clarion) "telleth of her noble life spent in works of Christian charity, so that never passeth she by the sick or poor or suffering without tendering the help and comfort that only the noblest women know how to give. As friend, tender helper, comforter and queen, I present your lady to you. My father was to you a good and just lord. Such as he was, by God's help I mean to be, and I will hold by you in weal or woe, and be, not your lord alone, but your strong friend, if you in like manner will hold by me and mine. Be faithful to me and to your lady and I will be true to you, so help me God."

There was a moment's pause, then the cheering broke out again more loud than ever, while the young knight flung some gold pieces to the white-haired minstrel and disappeared into the Castle.

That night bonfires blazed on all the hills, so that red glowing lights shot up into the sky, and in neighbouring villages all danced and sang and drank until the dawn of day.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIFE at Stourton Castle now settled down into monotonous regularity, a regularity only broken into by the strange perversity with which, from time to time, Isobel's fits of illness would attack her. It was almost as if they were infectious, for more than once Janet was affected in like manner, causing consternation and terror among the servants.

Lady Stourton after the exertion she had made in bringing home her son's young bride seemed to lose strength again, and day after day found her more quiet and inert, more pale and silent, her soft grey hair became white as snow and her step slow and languid. The one thing that seemed to animate and give her pleasure was her tender love for her daughter-in-law, and this affection was returned by Nell with a love almost amounting to devotion. It was Lady Stourton's delight to adorn the fair young wife with all that was costly and beautiful. With a kind of dislike she took from her and put aside the jewelled serpent which had seemed to her in some way an uncanny and outlandish ornament; but in its place she gave her strings of pearls, and the white and silver brocade which Isobel had entreated her not to buy, served to make her a splendid gown of ceremony, in which the mother loved to see her adorned when guests came to the Castle, and the rites of hospitality demanded splendour from its young *châtelaine*.

Like many of the secret members of the persecuted church, Nell wore nothing but black or white, and as black was distasteful to her knight, she moved through life like a snow-wreath in her whiteness.

On Fridays the sick and the poor had been ever wont to assemble in the Castle court for almsgiving and help, and now, in addition to the usual number, pale, *ague*-stricken patients used to come, folks who had come from the far-off marsh-lands carrying sick children, and disclosing ills, the sad result of constant *ague* and scant food. Among them the live-long day Nell Stourton toiled, and her mother-in-law, seeing and understanding her skill, would help her in every way, never leaving her side till the task was done, a task which grew so much heavier that at last it was found necessary to apportion another day in the week also to the Castle doles.

On other days also Nell's life was a much occupied and full one. She had to prepare her ointments and medicines, and there were household duties to do and superintend, and fine needlework in which her mother-in-law excelled, and she also must take her part.

It was well for Nell that her life was thus so full, for it gave her the less time to dwell on the fact that she could not but perceive

that her young knight looked no longer joyous and free from care as he had been wont to do, but that he was often restless and preoccupied.

When in the solitude of their own private apartments Nell would sit with her fair head resting on his shoulder, and his arm around her, she would strive in the old winning way to gain his confidence, to persuade him to tell her what trouble it was now haunting him. But it was in vain. He would fling off his depression, and assert that nothing troubled him, that his own sweet wife was all he wanted, and that in her love was Heaven itself. Nell would look earnestly, wistfully into his eyes, and under her gaze they would turn away and he would strive in caresses to drown her misgivings.

So it seemed as if there was a cloud hanging over the brightness of the once joyous household, a cloud so thin and impalpable that no one knew from whence it came.

Isobel also lived among them, yet not of them; more and more she withdrew herself from family life, living in her own rooms with her faithful Janet, and when she appeared, assuming a gravity of demeanour and elaborate ceremoniousness, which effectually quelled all light-heartedness, so that upon Sir Ralph himself the sensation of oppression became almost unbearable.

The summer and autumn passed away and the cold frosts and snows of winter. Then came the Yule-tide, which was kept in some solemnity—no feasting or dancing, only vast almsgiving and doles to the poor within a radius of many miles.

On the morning of New Year's Day a messenger from the Castle set all the bells in Bainton pealing loud and right joyously, for there were rejoicings and thanksgivings in the house of Stourton, for a little child had been born to Nell—a little child of great beauty of feature and limb, to carry on his father's race.

With the birth of the child it might surely seem as if every shadow and cloud would pass away. It was a hard winter, and the icicles hung in diamond points round every window, and the ground was a sheet of white hard snow, so that every sound vibrated clear and high on the crisp air.

One day Nell, wrapped in white furs, with her hardy little baby in her arms, looked up as her young knight clanked into the room with ice still hard upon his boots; and in her smile was a look so radiant, so full of unutterable happiness, that he knelt down beside her and exclaimed:

"Truly, my Nell, we are right ungenerous! In distress and perplexity we cry loudly on our God for help, and when He sendeth such joy as this, we are very slow to thank Him."

"Yet can that be remedied," said Nell softly, as her kisses strayed on the little dark downy head of the sleeping child.

"Have you told our Nell the news?" said Lady Stourton, coming forward.

"News?" said Nell. "No, Ralph has told me nothing, sweet mother."

"Harry Stourton has but now arrived."

Nell looked up wonderingly. "A kinsman of yours, sweetheart?" she said.

"Mine own cousin, the only kinsman I have, and one who would have been my heir but for this little one."

"You would rejoice as we do," said Lady Stourton, "if, dear Nell, you knew how very close and dear to us this young kinsman is—to me as a younger son, to Ralph and Isobel as a brother and once dear playmate."

"And he has come?" said Nell, with a slight mournful feeling of how little, how very little, she knew of her young knight's friends.

"Yes, he has come," said Lady Stourton. "He lives now in London, and has a Court appointment which keeps him ever with our gracious king; but he has been ill—his chest was ever delicate—and he has obtained leave of absence for a long space, and comes home to be nursed into health again. You also will welcome him?"

"Aye, a thousand times, so he bring one extra smile to you, Ralph!" said Nell, looking fondly up into her husband's face. "And haply he may bring smiles again to your cousin Isobel," she added hesitatingly.

Ralph started. It gave him a quick and unaccountable stab to think that anyone should bring smiles to Isobel save himself; he had for so very long been the one centre and object of her life. The idea was curiously distasteful.

"Isobel is ill," he said; "she cannot brook the hardness of the winter. When the cold is gone, then will she smile and be gay once more."

"Meanwhile," said Lady Stourton gravely, "her dark humours do greatly harass us."

"Women are ever hard on women," said Ralph a little sharply, for he felt that there was a certain flattery to himself in this very gloom, caused by the loss of himself, and being much away from home its shadow did not fall on him.

His mother bent over the child. "What do you say, my Nell?" she said. "Will you have our Harry for his sponsor, as Ralph and I would wish?"

"Right willingly!" said Nell, smiling. "But his name, sweet mother, thwart me not in this. I have set my heart on his name."

Ralph looked a little anxious, but he said kindly, "Name him as you will, mine own wife; your choice shall be mine."

"Then will I name him Michael," said Nell joyously; "and the great St. Michael will make of him as good and noble a soldier as your father, Ralph."

Lady Stourton bent down and kissed the sleeping child; she could not speak.

In one of the great rooms below stairs Isobel sat by the fire. She had cast aside her mourning now, and was dressed in crimson silk. The red flames made the rich colour glow. Her dark eyes shone, the colour mantled in her lips and cheeks; she looked very handsome.

Harry Stourton, the newly-arrived guest, stood on the hearth looking down on her. He was tall and very slight. His face was of a very pure oval, the dark hair cut close. He had large soft eyes, and the outline of brow and chin were too clearly defined, so thin—almost wasted—were they. A slight moustache shaded the sensitive mouth.

"You have scarcely seen my aunt, have you, Harry?" said Isobel, speaking eagerly.

"Scarcely. She met me at the door with her own warm mother-greeting; but it was so dark that I could note nothing but the wistfulness of her face under the widow's coif."

"Ah, all is sadly altered for the worse; you will hardly recognise this house!"

"And yet, Isobel," he said gently, "surely the new elements of happiness—Ralph's young wife, of whom I hear that she is good as well as fair, and the birth of the little heir—must have comforted our dear Aunt Mary?"

"What reports have reached you concerning Nell?" cried Isobel, her eyes flashing.

"I had business with Master Ambrose Kirby—an order of importance to transmit—and he spoke of her. That same good man, by-the-way, shows the change of which you speak; he has lost his sturdy width of build, and looks grey and somewhat aged."

"Men say that he also loved her; she spared none!" said Isobel bitterly.

"Loved whom? Not our young cousin?"

"Have you heard naught of her origin, then? She was no fit mate for the lord of Stourton."

"I heard that she was of gentle birth, but greatly impoverished, fatherless, and living with her widowed mother in some house in the country. Is not this true?"

"All true, and yet but a section of the truth. Yes, Ambrose Kirby also loved her, yet had by the blessing of Heaven a right merciful escape."

"Alas," said Harry, "then I begin to fear some evil chance has fallen on us! What is it, Isobel?"

"Listen to me, Hal, and deem me not unmaidenly if I speak openly. Do you remember how all went here? Do you remember that one and all looked upon my betrothal with Ralph as a settled thing, only to be proclaimed when we might choose. Do you remember that it was my uncle's dearest wish? That we were brought up together? That he was my young lover, mine own, no one's property but mine!"

Her voice rose wildly, and she rose and stood beside him with clenched hands. Harry said nothing, but as he leant against the heavy stone-work of the mantelpiece and looked down on her, a dark look of anxiety and misgiving grew in his eyes.

"Listen, Harry," she went on. "My aunt had told me, and no false imagination had led me astray, that he loved me, and I, dreaming that all was well, I loved him. I loved him so that I could have strangled him with these hands rather than have lost him. Your blood is milk; you change colour like a girl, and I see you shrink from me. After all you do not know, you cannot understand the passion of a woman scorned!"

"Call it not love!" cried Harry. "Love is not cruel!"

"I knew you could not understand; yet may one believe in what he cannot understand, and I call on you to believe me. Such love as this brooks no rival. I tell you he was mine!"

"Isobel, be calm."

"Calm? I am cold as ice, for all that wasted love of mine has turned my heart to stone. Hear me to the end. One morning Ralph rode forth bright, gay and debonnair, and from the Castle steps I watched my lover go—for ever, Hal, for ever."

"Poor Isobel!"

"He that came back, tardily summoned to his father's dying bed, was not my Ralph, but a stranger; a man moving through life under some spell, not of Heaven, not of earth, perchance of Hell."

"What are you saying?"

Isobel laughed a curious short laugh which made her cousin shudder as he looked at her blazing eyes.

"Harry, you have lived so long at Court, in the very midst of life's interests, a larger, wider world than this of ours, that you forget that strange things yet linger in the uncivilised and remote places of the earth—foul doings, secret spells, unholy dealings with the unseen world. You shrink, but the fact must be faced, for as I am a living woman I tell the truth. This girl who has robbed me of my lover is a child of Satan, a witch!"

The words came hissing from her lips.

"You speak without warrant," cried Harry fiercely. "You would condemn this our kinswoman without proof, simply to gratify revenge. Isobel, are you my cousin Isobel?"

Her mouth was distorted with a bitter sneer.

"In the change you see in me, behold also her work," she cried. "I tell you I have proofs, and among the servants of this house eight out of each ten will ratify my words. What more proof do you need? Ralph went forth bright, gay and well; he came home pale and wan and changed. His father on his very death-bed came under the hideous spell, and cried ever for 'Annora, Annora!' till the walls resounded with her name. They sent for her, the cunning woman, and in her place Ralph himself brought back her daughter, this white-

faced girl whom the people call my Lady Moon. Listen, Harry! As she crossed the threshold of his room mine uncle died! I myself would fain explain the strange effect she has on me. Even as he, our Ralph, led her into the hall, there came a roaring in my ears, a darkness on my sight, a cold sweat on my brow and then a heavy fall. It was a strange distemper from which at times I suffer yet, and my poor Janet also, when she turns her great grey eyes on us."

"Is this all?" cried Harry contemptuously.

"Not enough? I will go on. Six months we dwelt here as usual, and I knew that all the hope and joy of life was gone for me. I pined for him even as now I pine. I hungered for him as I hunger fiercely now, and yet more and more it came home to my desolate soul that he was in thrall and lost to me. You ask more proofs? At last the thunder-bolt fell. He went away, away to the dark lair on the fever-stricken marsh they call Kettering Mere, where he dwelt with her whom he now proclaimed his wedded wife."

Harry put his hand gently on hers. With all the strong distaste he felt for her wild lack of discipline, he suffered in her bitter pain. She tossed it away, the high-strung nerves brooking no tenderness.

"Then even my own Aunt Mary forsook me," she went on. "And, despite all my prayers and warnings, she proclaimed far and wide her consent to her son's marriage, feigned a happiness she could not feel, and rode forth one brilliant day when the world was all sunshine and light to bring home the bride."

"She was ever the wisest and noblest of women," said Harry.

"You ask for more proofs. They arrived. Lo, a goodly feast of delicate fare provided; but not one servitor, not one visible to baptised men! Mark! the sky was blue and cloudless, but while they feasted a great darkness fell. It is a wild strange place with a hanging stone terrace over the far-stretching water, and on this terrace behold she stood, clinging to her shoulder a great grey creature, cat or tiger none could say which. The fearsome thunder rolled, and the green forked lightning played on her strange silver hair and wondrously glanced from a collar of living flame about her neck. When she came in, her white gown was dry while the storms of rain slanted hissing over the wide expanse of the Mere. Is this no proof? Even then God's elements rose up to cry 'Leave her with us, this child of the storm and lightning. Leave us the witch!'"

"Isobel!"

"You ask for proofs! When the storm had done its worst they brought round Snow, the white horse trained for my aunt to ride. He is calm and very gentle in temper, and lo! the creature went stark mad, and reared and plunged so that Ralph and stubborn Joe could scarce constrain him to bear home this unholy bride. And on the very threshold once more I stood to meet her, and the fit came on me so that I fell, foaming at the mouth. Tell me, are these no proofs?"

Terribly shocked, Harry hid his face on his arm. She stood watching him in panting expectation, with clenched teeth from which the lips were drawn back.

He spoke at last, raising his face.

"Isobel," he said, "I am one who judges not by what I am told or by general rumour, for I have lived long enough to know how cruel and remorseless is scandal, and that truth itself can be twisted into false testimony. I will not condemn on such evidence as that you have put before me until I myself know my cousin's wife."

"Until you also have fallen beneath the spell," said Isobel bitterly. "I might have known it! What man can be just when a beautiful woman is in question?"

Harry smiled.

"Yet, have I not even seen her, Isobel! Dear cousin, from my heart I pity and I sympathise with you. But pray you be patient with me. Have you ever thought of the gravity of these charges you bring so lightly forward; of the horrible danger and disgrace involved in them."

"I know it," said Isobel. "By less evidence than this, women have been burned in the public market-place!"

"Isobel, you know not what you say!" he exclaimed in horror.

She was about to answer, when the door swung back and Ralph came in.

Harry looked up at him with a sense of extreme relief, because this *tête-à-tête* which was fast becoming intolerable to him was interrupted by his entrance.

"Come, my Harry," cried the young knight brightly, "I would present you to my wife. Will you come?"

"Right willingly," answered his cousin, and Isobel, standing by the fire, watched them depart with a strained, baffled expression on her dark face.

CHAPTER XX.

THE room into which Sir Ralph brought his cousin seemed a very haven of peace after the stormy scene through which he had just passed.

On a low chair near the fire sat Nell dressed in her white furs, and opposite to her Lady Stourton held the sleeping child in her arms, as she often held it for hours, as if she could not bear to put it from her.

There was a whiteness, an exquisite loveliness and purity about sweet Nell, so that all the dark stories to which Harry had been hearkening, blew away like unwholesome mists before the freshness of her innocence, and as he bent his knee to kiss her little hand, he inwardly vowed himself her champion and defender. Truly he had

fallen under the spell, but it was the pure and holy spell of her sweet womanhood.

Ralph had much to ask and much to hear concerning matters in London, and Nell listened, first with amusement and then with keen interest, as they spoke of the Papist question and King James' determination still to uphold the law against recusants. She sighed, for she thought of the weary secrecy, the constant danger in which her uncle lived, he now the last link with her own family. And as Harry spoke forcibly of the inflexibility of the line now taken by the King, her cheek grew pale, for she knew that whatever the risk might be, Father Johnstone would not for long leave his people without help.

"I weary my gentle cousin?" said Harry, stopping himself.

"No, no," cried Ralph, "it is not weariness, but this fair wife of mine is one of those persecuted folk, and some she loves are in danger."

"Is it so?" said Harry gently. "Then have I spoken heedlessly?" Nell shook her head.

"I am glad to know the truth," she said earnestly.

Later on Ralph sat talking to his cousin late into the night, pouring out to him the whole history of his marriage, and all the anxieties and misgivings that assailed him from time to time. The evil rumours permitted and even encouraged by Nan Miles never died out, but came up now and then in a way which both angered and startled the young knight. He would not speak of this to his mother or to his wife, and still less to Isobel, whom he suspected of seeing and knowing many things which did not even reach his own ears. The relief of pouring it all out to the cousin who was dear to him as a brother, was very great.

Harry could not make light of the danger—it was too real and actual a thing in those days of strong superstition—but he shared with Ralph his belief in the strength of the authority of the Castle—an authority which dated from feudal times, and had never yet been called in question. Harry could not but see that the whispers respecting his wife irritated and angered Ralph to an almost unbearable degree, and his anger found vent in a furious tirade against the mad folly of her mother—a tirade so vehement that it struck Harry that the nerves of his cousin were more shaken than he had thought at first.

"Anyhow, for this year at least you will stay with me," said the young knight at last. "Two are better than one, and I have need of you."

"I will stay with you," said Harry gaily. "But speak not so dolefully, Ralph; it is I that have need of you, not you of me. I need rest and cossetting from your dear mother, being somewhat unfit for my duties now; and as for you, you are all-powerful!"

"Even my father was not all-powerful in this matter," said Ralph,

with a look of care. "With a high hand he would suppress the slander, but behind his back he only increased it by his vehemence, for those fools would have it that he himself was bewitched by Annora!"

"Well, Mistress Annora is dead—Heaven rest her soul!—and you and I, Ralph, are strong enough to silence the knaves and, we must hope, the goodies. As for Isobel, what ails her?"

"I know not—that is, I am loth to say," said Ralph hastily.

"Unrequited love?" said Harry. "Did you ever love her, Ralph?"

"As I live, never, nor ever courted her! The fancy struck her from our cousinly affection and the misfortune of my father and mother's wishes, which, unhappily, they did not conceal, as would have been more prudent."

"Were it not better that Isobel should go hence and spend some months away from here?"

Ralph shook his head. "To whom could she go?" he cried. "And I cannot brook the idea of turning from my door my orphan cousin—one who has ever been a sister to us."

"Nay, nay, but for her own sake, and a little, perhaps, for the sake of your wife, to whom so unloving a presence must surely be a trouble."

"She would not say so; Nell's dearest wish is to win her heart."

"Well, well, we will wait and see."

He leant back, looking so weary that Ralph perceived it. "Good night, Hal!" he said. "Sleep well and dream of all that is bright and fair! Ah, if your thoughts would turn to Isobel, then all would be well, and no fancied love could rival yours!"

"Too late!" said Harry softly. "I am betrothed, and at times I think that the bridal-day is not far distant."

Something in the strange far-off look of Harry's eyes startled Ralph.

"Betrothed, and I knew it not?" he faltered.

"My bride will be death," Harry murmured dreamily, "and, by God's mercy, she will show me Paradise! Still, I would not that her bridal wreath should be of icicles!"—and he shivered.

"Now you are cold and weary, and this makes you talk in this gloomy and morbid manner," said Ralph hastily. "I go, and will hear no more. Good-night!"

Harry answered "Good-night," but the dreamy look yet lingered in his eyes when he lay down to rest—to struggle through the long night hours as usual tormented by incessant coughing.

On the morrow the frost was harder than ever, and the sheet of white snow lying on the ground was firm and sparkling underfoot. The whole family met at breakfast for the first time all together for many a long day. Nell restored to health and strength looked fair as ever in her white gown. Isobel had risen that morning with a sudden longing for return to a different state of things. The sight

My Lady Moon.

of Harry had aroused in her breast some of her old love of conquest. She would break through her solitary habits and come once more among her kinsfolk. She gazed in the polished mirror and saw herself handsomer than ever, her lips scarlet, her dark eyes brilliant, and the evil thought came into her mind. She would strive with all the power of fascination she possessed to attract Harry, and if this gave a pang of jealousy to the cousin whom she yet so madly loved, it might cause her rival a new hitherto unknown anguish.

In the splendour of her beauty she swept downstairs, and, as Ralph entered the great hall with his young wife by his side, the thought struck him that never before had he known how handsome was his cousin Isobel.

He came forward greeting her eagerly.

"Welcome, most welcome, Isobel," he said. "Now, at last, is our home-circle complete again. Nell, will you not welcome her?"

Nell came up with outstretched hands and her sweet face raised to kiss her; but she suddenly stopped short, for over Isobel's features came the strange writhing contortions that were wont to herald in her fainting fits, and seeing it Ralph suddenly sprang between them.

"Keep back, Nell," he said sharply, and he led Isobel a little aside and pressed upon her a cup of wine. "The effort is too much for you," he said tenderly; "drink this, sweet coz. There, you are quite well now. It is but the first effort," and, leading her by the hand, he conducted her to the table, placing her by himself and away from the vicinity of his wife.

Lady Stourton watched the little scene very gravely, and calling Nell to her she held her hand fast, for her colour came and went, and she trembled much. She placed her between herself and Harry, and they turned the talk on gay topics, hunting and hawking and the feats of dogs and horses during the past year, so that Ralph was drawn into it and all went well.

Later on, attracted by the sunshine which shone gaily on the white sparkling of ice and hoar-frost, they went out sledging. Harry drove Isobel with a spirited horse tossing its sleigh-bells and fleetly skimming over the frozen snow. Her spirits rose, she talked and laughed as she had been wont to do in old days, and the young blood tingled gaily once more in her veins.

By-and-by Ralph and Nell flew past them in their rival sledge; they raced against each other, and their laughter rang out right joyously. The cares of life seemed for once to vanish in joyousness. Once Nell said to her husband:

"Ralph, does not your cousin look too pale? He seems not strong, and black Nancy is pulling hard at the reins."

But Ralph only laughed and said, "You know not Harry. The finest rider, the swiftest runner, the best sportsman in England. He fatigued by a two hours' drive of black Nance? 'Tis the white reflection from off the snow that blanches him thus."

"May be," said Nell thoughtfully.

But her words, though he had rejected them, awakened a sudden fear in Ralph. He turned his horses.

"Home!" he shouted gaily. "We must not fatigue our fair ladies. Home, Harry, home!"

That night when supper was over they all sat round the great fire of logs in the great hall. To any outsider it would have seemed as if nowhere in England could be seen a family more at peace or more united.

Lady Stourton bent over fine embroidery; Nell, a little weary and very full of happiness, leaned back in the corner of a great carved oak settle with idle fingers, and a look of perfect content on her face. Her husband sat by her side, diligently mending the leathern thong of a riding-whip.

Isobel sat by the table, her haughty head leaning on her hand, her burning eyes fixed on Harry, who knelt on the hearth among the dogs, caressing and playing with them.

"Come, Hal," cried Ralph cheerily, "take this, and be not so idle, man. Sing to us; Nell has never heard you sing, and I will not raise your vanity by telling her what men say of your minstrelsy."

He handed to him an inlaid lute of Isobel's which lay on the table. Still kneeling among the dogs, Harry took the lute and tuned it.

"Now will you be astonished, sweetheart!" said Ralph proudly.

"No one ever sang as doth our Harry!"

Then Harry began to sing, and over them all fell the spell of that wonderful music. His voice began first in low tones of infinite sweetness, but as the words grew nobler, and each verse ended in a triumphant refrain, it swelled into power till like a clarion it resounded through the hall.

"Over the frost-bound earth
Black cold hath sway;
Frozen is joy and mirth,
Light hidden away.
But the sun will break
Through iron-bound pain,
And light will conquer—
Will conquer and reign.

Over a broken heart
Sad thoughts will steal;
Torment must be its part,
Piercing like steel.
But the hope will break
Through iron-bound pain,
And love will conquer—
Will conquer and reign.

Over our evil world
Dark sins will brood;
Satan's banner unfurled,
All war with good.
But the day will break
Through iron-bound pain,
And Christ will conquer—
Will conquer and reign."

Nell sat forward, looking at him with clasped hands. The clue to life seemed to lie in his words. They rang through her head, till it seemed as if the angels themselves must be singing them, so strange was the note of joy and triumph.

She could not speak, the tears choked and blinded her.

Ralph looked at her and smiled a little.

"It is ever thus with those who hear him sing for the first time, Nell," he said. "Is it not different from aught you have ever heard before?"

"In that lies the fault," cried Isobel with displeasure. "It seems ever as if in these gloomy canticles of yours you would preach to us."

"Ah, but if all preaching were as beautiful, then would it be right easy to learn," said Lady Stourton earnestly. "My boy, sing ever thus, and so shall your angel voice point us the way to Heaven."

Harry did not answer; he was thoughtfully touching the strings of the lute as his dark eyes turned from one speaker to another.

"One more song!" cried Ralph. "Your voice is more noble, more powerful than ever, Hal, and it rejoices my heart to hear it again. What say you, Nell? Shall he sing again?"

"If it hurt him not," said Nell gently, for her practised eye discerned that the young minstrel had pressed his thin hand for a moment on his breast as if he suffered.

"Nay, one more song will not hurt me, fair coz," he said smiling, "if so be this cough of mine interrupt me not."

He touched a few chords; Isobel bent forward. "Prithee, let us have something of more light fashion; a serenade perhaps, or some of the bright love-songs in fashion."

"I do not know them, Isobel. I can but sing the songs I know, and if they are sad I commend me to the kindness of the company. Haply they are monkish, but bethink you, Isobel, you did ever dub me minstrel-monk in the old days."

He sang again while all hung entranced.

"Wars were convulsing the earth,
Battles and fire and strife,
Famine and hunger and dearth,
Struggles for barest life!
And lo! from Heaven above
Came down the Lord of love;
Conflicts and warfare did cease—
Jesus to earth brought peace!

Sorrow and failure and woe
Troubled the human race;
Ever hot tears would flow
As each fell out of his place.
And lo! from Heaven above
Came down the Lord of love;
Failure passed by, men had scope—
Jesus to earth brought hope!

Sorrow and mourning and tears,
Men weeping over their dead,
Women in anguish and fears
O'er souls gone wrong or misled.
And lo! from Heaven above
Came down the Lord of love,
Raising the whole human race—
Jesus to earth brought grace!

For these Thy priceless gifts, O Lord,
What have we offered as reward?
Whisper with bated breath,
Jesu, we have given Thee death!"

His voice died away. He rose, laid down the lute and stood silent. There was a long pause; then Lady Stourton put aside her embroidery.

"Nell, my child, it grows late," she said. Then, putting her arms round Harry, she kissed him lovingly. "Truly the angels have taught you to sing, my boy," she murmured.

Isobel made no good-night speeches. She gathered up her lute and went swiftly away. Looking after her wistfully, Lady Stourton wondered whether the music had touched her heart, and in the loneliness of her own room she prayed long that night for the wild rebellious girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE winter months passed away and the spring set in. It was a season of unusual cold and damp, vegetation was tardy, and fogs hung over the country.

Throughout the winter, Harry had lived with his cousins and submitted to careful nursing from his aunt, to whom he was almost as dear as her own son. The care and enforced prudence seemed to have a really good effect on his health. He coughed less, suffered less, and was even able to join once more in hunting and hawking to his own keen enjoyment.

Harry's presence continued to have a good influence over Isobel. She threw off her solitary habits and lived once more as she had been wont to do. But, in spite of all Nell's gentle efforts, she kept her entirely at bay, till at last, fearful of exciting that greatly dreaded convulsive hysteria, it became tacitly arranged that they should keep entirely apart, and not even the morning and evening greeting, the sisterly kiss that Nell so wistfully offered, was possible. To Ralph, strangely enough, there was something flattering in the belief that Isobel could not overcome this feeling, and believing the failure to be despite her utmost efforts, it filled him with a great sympathy and tenderness for her.

More and more was he interested in his cousin. Nell's strength was not great enough that winter to enable her to accompany him every day in rides and walks of many miles, so that by degrees Isobel became constantly his companion, and often when Nell could have gone with them she was prevented by a threatening of Isobel's malady, which promptly put an end to the project.

This same threat hanging over her began to tell on the young wife's nerves. She grew timid. In all her knowledge of medicine, such as it was, gleaned from her mother's traditions of herb-doctoring, she had no clue to this distemper of Isobel's, and it terrified her. It seemed so markedly to point to herself as the origin and cause—and this before strangers as well as within their own family circle.

One day it was arranged by Ralph's wish that Nell should join with the others in the morning's pastime. They were not going far,

only to skirt a beech-wood in the park where a bright stream ran, and it was a favourite ground for hawking.

The gay cavalcade was ready to start, and Ralph Stourton had placed his young wife in the saddle, when suddenly Isobel's horse took fright. She was just in the act of mounting when it happened. The horse swerved and reared, breaking from the groom who held it, and throwing Isobel violently to the ground. Harry was at her side instantly, raising her and asking anxiously whether she were hurt. She stood for one moment silent, as if stunned.

Meanwhile Nell sprang from her horse and ran to her, her grey eyes shining with anxiety, for the moment entirely forgetting the barrier between them.

"Are you hurt, dearest Isobel?" she cried, putting her arms round the motionless figure.

Quick as lightning Harry strove to interpose and snatch her away, but he was too late. Isobel seemed to shrink and writhe under Nell's gentle touch, from her lips came the hoarse unnatural cry they knew so well, she threw out her arms violently and fell, foaming at the mouth.

The grooms drew together in a terrified group, the horses unnerved and terrified, struggled to get loose. Harry knelt down by Isobel, and raised her head. Between himself and Ralph they carried her into the house. Nell stood for a moment watching—an agonised feeling that she alone could do nothing brought the hot tears to her eyes.

As the two men passed her, bearing the now rigid form of Isobel, Harry's eyes met hers full of kind compassion. She went quietly away upstairs. At first she longed to fly to her mother-in-law, to pour out her griefs in her loving arms, but she had long ago made it a rule of her life to hide from her the full bitterness of her relations with Isobel, so she turned aside, shut herself into her own room and then gave vent to a passionate burst of weeping.

Meanwhile the two men had borne Isobel into the house and laid her on the couch by the fire. Harry knelt beside her and chafed her hands. Ralph would have called her women, but with a gesture Harry begged him to desist.

"She is coming to herself," he said. "And the fewer witnesses we have of this scene the better!"

"Something must be done," said Ralph gloomily. "This cannot go on for ever."

"You must send her away," said Harry quietly. His finger was on Isobel's pulse, and in spite of her rigid state he felt it bound.

"You must send her away," he repeated.

"To that will I never consent," exclaimed Ralph fiercely. "What? Send forth my orphan cousin, the maid committed to my father's care for life? Never! She is to me a sacred charge. Nay, I must rather take order with my own wife!"

"What do you mean?" said Harry, looking up with deep anxiety. "What can she have to do with it?"

"That must I ascertain," said Ralph firmly. "You, Harry, are not so ignorant of women and their ways as not to know that they suffer not a rival."

"There can be no question of rivalry," said Harry between his set teeth, "when the one is your honoured wife."

"You speak like a boy! You do not understand."

"You say sooth! I do not understand! What do you suspect?" cried Harry as hotly as his cousin.

Ralph lowered his voice, and his face grew very pale.

"Harry," he said, almost in a whisper, "I told you of the strange rumours always floating about Nan Miles and Kettering Mere. They are the curse of my life; they haunt me; they will not leave me; they torment me."

"Aye," said Harry, "fostered by this cruel tongue!" and he pointed to Isobel.

"Pshaw, listen to me! What if there were some truth in them? There are more marvels than we wot of in this world of ours."

Harry looked at him with horror blanching his face. "You are mad!" he cried.

"I accuse not Nell," said Ralph, still in the same hoarse whisper, "but if she knows something of her mother's evil power? If in this case, mark you, only in this case, temptation has proved too strong, it shall be stopped. I have determined on my course. The rights of kinship, the orphan condition of this poor maid demand my protection. By heaven I will tax her with it!"

"God help her!" cried Harry. "You will kill your innocent wife!"

"I can bear no more," cried Ralph, springing to his feet. "The doubt will drive me mad! I have sacrificed my life for her. I have wed with one on whom men look askance."

"Hush!" cried Harry suddenly, for Isobel's rigidity began to give way, and both men, hushed into silence, stood watching her. One or two convulsive movements passed over her face, then her dark eyes opened widely and she raised herself.

"Ralph, Ralph!" she cried, with a movement of trembling terror like that of a child. "Ralph, you will take care of me! I may trust you! Take care of me, Ralph."

She clung to his arm, gazing imploringly into his face.

"My poor Isobel," he said gently. "What should harm you? Am not I here to protect and guard you. Trust me, trust ever in me."

Isobel glanced round her fearfully. "Is she gone?" she whispered.

"There is no one here but ourselves," said Harry sternly. Isobel turned from him to her cousin.

"I am frightened," she cried. "It is so terrible, the strange thrill, the cold breath of air, the unknown influence."

Ralph glanced at Harry strangely, but saw only a look of strong displeasure in his face.

Isobel went on wailing :

"Oh, hold fast my hand ! You alone, Ralph, can save me from her."

"Isobel," said Harry, very gravely and coldly, "you forget to whom you are speaking. Would it not be better to speak thus to our aunt, who has ever been a mother to you ?"

"Till she also fell under the spell," said Isobel harshly, and she hid her face in her hands.

Ralph stood looking down upon her, his face was white and drawn, his eyes gleamed. Harry put his hand upon his shoulder.

"Go," he said earnestly, "pray your mother to come here, and for the sake of all you hold dear, seek not your wife till we have spoken together again."

Ralph shook off the kind hand and went away rapidly. Harry looked after him with a feeling of despair.

It seemed to him hours rather than moments before Lady Stourton came, followed by her women, and took charge of Isobel. Her eyes were large with a scared expression, and as the women were supporting Isobel to her room she returned hastily and whispered :

"Harry, for Heaven's sake follow Ralph, and strive not to lose sight of him. If it be only not too late ! My heart misgives me !"

Harry nodded, and she hastily followed Isobel. Full of dire misgivings he went upstairs.

(To be continued.)



FURTHER ADVENTURES OF A GUINEA PIG.

BY C. J. LANGSTON.

HOW pleasant is the remembrance of two parishes in Somersetshire where I took duty in November 1894! The venerable Rector, who had lately inherited the manorial estate, but still lived in the quaint Rectory of C., was a capital specimen of the fine old English gentleman, courteous and genial, whose keen sense of the humorous seasoned well his pleasant tales of the olden time.

On the Saturday evening my young man-servant and I were met at S. Station by a covered waggonette and a smart juvenile Jehu; but Master Freddy had a way of dashing over ruts and pebbles, careering round corners, and narrowly grazing heavy carts, which sometimes threw the inside passengers and portmanteaus rather much together, and kept me nervously anxious as to the next volcanic shock; and I was relieved to reach the cottage Rectory of B., which had been carefully furnished and fitted up for an incoming curate.

The origin of the house is peculiar.

Many years ago, this living, in conjunction with C., was held by an absentee, who was an under-master at Rugby; and the humble occupant of the then Rectory being haled before the magistrates, excused, I believe, some slight delinquency by declaring that his house was not fit for a pigsty. Inquiries were made, and the Bishop insisted upon repairs; upon which the Rector, sending down a lump sum, ordered a fresh house to be built, which he never saw; and, declaring he would not be bothered, turned again to his books.

Leaving the waggonette, the drive gate opened just enough to let us splash into a large puddle, and we felt our way amid loose gravel and boulders up to the front door, which, being freshly painted and shut directly afterwards, required much persuasion to open. Once within, and candles lighted, the caretaker retired to her cottage, and C. and I were left alone.

A vacant house in winter is suggestive of damp, and the first thing was to mend the fires. By the ingenuity of the architect, all the chimneys were arranged in one block in the centre of the roof, and to accomplish this feat flues wandered at all angles in all directions. Consequently, in defiance of gravitation, the smoke from fires downstairs would not go up; and the smoke upstairs would persist in coming down, making the eyes smart, and obscuring the candle lights like the gas in a London fog. A hoar frost outside, and doors open inside, kept the temperature abnormally cool; but with the bright

kettle singing on the hob, and wine-glasses forming extempore egg-cups, I felt the tranquil influence of the hour.

The quaint little church close by had been flooded the previous Sunday, as we saw by the brown dado on the walls, and there was a vapoury smell about the edifice somewhat suggestive of eels, and of the fungi which Edward Fitzgerald saw growing about the communion-table at Boulge. In a very small vestry in the tower was a large, limp surplice of many folds spread out to dry on a bench which was backed by a pile of disused Christmas decorations, where I found to my cost all had perished but prickles.

Something worse than prickles awaited me on the morning of Sunday, December 13th, 1891, when I alighted at C. Station amid a hurricane of wind and rain that was tropical. Ah! thought I, as the staid driver greeted me on the platform, luckily the waggonette has a cover. What was my horror to find it without one!

"Very sorry, sir; but if I had put the cover on we must have been blowed over."

"I never knew heavy rain like this with such a tremendous wind last long," said I. "Let us take shelter on the opposite side till we are obliged to move."

Delay proved useless, for the wind still violently shook the projecting roof, and hurled the water over it in sheets.

The poor horse suddenly fell lame as we commenced the drive to C——l Church, meeting the full force of this exceptional storm.

I crouched, tightening a small rug round me, and bringing my umbrella well over my shoulders. Alas! the enemy prevailed. Up the first hill rude Boreas seized my gamp, turned it inside out, and rendered it useless. My overcoat absorbed the water like a sponge, and the broad rim of my soft felt cap, having collected sufficient, occasionally sent a small Niagara down my back to feed the streamlets on the seat, so that when we reached the church gates I was, to use the expression of Mr. Mantalini, a "damp, moist, unpleasant body."

Having travelled twenty-five miles in such weather, I could hardly expect muscular Christianity to move beyond its doorstep, and the congregation scarcely numbered half a dozen. Fortunately, as a preservative against fire, large iron plates had been affixed to the woodwork surrounding the stove. These were pleasantly warm, and over them I laid my saturated coats, which dried during the service; and when this was over the rain still continued, and being now without an umbrella, I had to risk apoplexy by running nearly a mile through sodden fields to the Rectory. In the evening the storm abated; but a land flood showed how heavy it had been.

My experience of the elements was even worse on that eventful Sunday morning, January the 13th, 1895, when C. and myself alighted at W. Station, expecting the usual trap to convey us to H. Church. The snow of the previous night had scarcely shown its white face in our city; but here the fall had been heavy and obdurate.

It had swept down the hills of the great White Horse; it had blocked all roads and avenues for locomotion, and the station-yard was one huge sheet with occasional double dots where enterprising porters had "made treks."

"Carriage, sir," said the station-master, highly amused; "why, nothing can come from yonder town, nor go beyond, I expect; this is an old-fashioned winter. Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" I echoed, not quite seeing where the joke came in.

"Well, our church is three miles off; we have an hour to get there; let us make a start, anyhow!"

We took a header, we floundered amid small avalanches, we dodged dykes, and doubled the actual distance to the obscure town of W.

"There," said I, out of breath, and looking like Father Christmas; "if the fly-proprietor, bearing the ominous name of Skull, cannot help us onward, we must still breast it."

Presently a tall horse was harnessed to a very tall two-wheeled dog-cart (my abhorrence) and a genial youth of the Mark Tapley type encouraged us to sit with him in front, and, at walking pace, we jerked over petrified billows, the brave horse straining and slipping, whilst one side of the vehicle was often so much lower than the other, that a turn over seemed inevitable, yet our driver never lost heart, and brought us to the church door in excellent time. A few half-frozen children formed the congregation, therefore a short service was quite sufficient for the occasion. Then my plucky attendant and I took our provisions to the school-house, built for the picturesque, and in the little parlour, all door and window, tried to think ourselves warm. Here we were to spend the night, but sudden illness had caused bed-rooms to be monopolized. Thus, after evening service, we had to grope amid Tartarean darkness and a drenching rain to a solitary farm-house, where, to a man long suffering from acute rheumatism, the excessively damp bed-room was appalling. The green paper hung flabbily on the walls, rain had come in from the roof, and the clamminess of the bed-linen was striking; whilst lozenges, usually remaining dry on the dressing-table, were melted like Guava jelly by the morning, when we were thankful that the rapid thaw enabled us to reach another station.

What a charming contrast was the stately rectory of H.—the ideal of an English home—chiefly built in the days of the early Georges, when the rector was often lord of the manor and Justice of the Peace, and the surplice on the Sunday would be exchanged for the red coat on the Monday; when the commutation of tithes, and the abolition of church rates were undreamt of, and happily long before "sacerdotalism commenced digging the grave of the Establishment."

During the winter of 1895-96 how I looked forward to my monthly visit to this secluded rectory, whose only occupants were the humble caretakers and myself!

The spacious house reflected in every part "the old time en-

tomed." The lofty entrance hall with marble busts on tall pedestals, gazing with closed lips and stony eyes, "silent till I be silent too." The ample staircase of black oak down which have tripped in ruff and hoop, and with merry laugh, those fair ladies looking from the walls with coquettish smiles transfixed by a Lely, or a Gainsborough. Severe by contrast are the bluff squires with flowing wigs, and half in armour, clasping their swords, amazed at my intrusion. And then the long line of rectors, descendants of the same family for more than two hundred years; one with the pale face of the ascetic, as if he would pierce the grand secret; another with the kindly look and placid brow of a Wesley, and others portly and pleasant in the endeavour to make the best of both worlds.

But the picture that appealed to my imagination as a pathetic poem was the full-sized likeness of the Earl of Kildare, styled below "the gallant." Habited in royal Tartan plaid with pendant sword and white plume waving from his jewelled cap, his fair face and beauteous eyes seemed more fit for the shrine of love than the wiles of war. Could that delicate hand have been raised to slay? Could the tender grace in those bright eyes have changed to the fierce glare of avenging scorn? Perhaps he bravely fought for Prince Charlie in 1745, for he died in the following year at the early age of forty-four. Yet he dies not: his fair face never fades from the canvas. In that old dining-room I see his gracious smile, and the beauteous eyes follow me still. "I shall know him when we meet."

To pass from the mansion to the humble cottage, I found myself last Easter Eve plodding three miles along a dusty Wiltshire road to the village of F., without meeting a soul. Here and there I noticed a stately row of trees, or a cluster of houses looking up for protection to the grey stone spire; but I saw no sign of my resting-place until reaching an abrupt descent I almost tumbled into the quiet village below.

"Yes, sir. You are to lodge here. My husband's father is clerk," said a buxom dame as I passed beneath a low thatched roof into the best parlour, where a homely meal was waiting. To gain my bedroom I had literally to crawl up a crooked staircase with an average tread of four inches, and to pass through two other chambers; and my hostess hoped I should not be disturbed by the birds in the thatch, thus kindly concealing no doubt, the presence of rats. An early riser, I had to listen attentively for the last footsteps down the rickety stairs ere I dare venture forth, and then came a difficulty.

The Vicar had recently died, and been buried in the parish surplice, and the dear old churchwarden thought I should bring my own, which I never do. Fortunately early in the seventeenth century a noble lady had founded in the village a College for the support of fifty widows with their daughters. The endowment arising from land had dwindled, alas, to a pittance for six; but there was the imposing chapel for occasional use, and there also was a surplice.

Such a village would have charmed the painter George Morland. The old English homesteads, resting in the shadow of sturdy elms; the long common furrowed by the sluggish stream, half-hidden by tufts of tall grass, and flowers, and bordered by the great high road which told of a time when twenty-five coaches passed daily between London and Bath; and above all, the dear little church, with its venerable yew, like Isis, the guardian of the dead, bending over the spot where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

How different was the Sunday School here, with its docile scholars so quiet and attentive from the noisy obtrusive imps I meet with elsewhere, especially at D! There the assemblage of children on the Sunday for an hour was like the uproar from juvenile anarchists. In vain the school-bell shrieked "Come, come!" for, when the chief teacher and myself entered, the room would be empty, the boys being engaged in chasing the girls, nothing loth, outside. A few diminutives would be coaxed in, just enough to start a hymn, a risky venture; for one minute there would be a gush of minstrelsy, and the next a shaky solo, with occasional flashes of silence, during which the boys would besiege the door, and at length condescend to form a class, beating the benches with sticks, and prodding each other, unless engaged in devouring apples.

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast;" and hymns were frequent. I well remember one, because the rebels having seized the unfortunate refrain—"Singing Glory, Glory, Glory!" would not let it drop, but tossed it in the air, and shook it out, and played with it, regardless of time and harmony. No sooner had I checked the chorus of the gods in one direction than "Singing Glory, Glory, Glory!" burst forth in another: and when the last vocal firework had gone off, and we closed the school, I thought the hour had been multiplied by three.

Much as may be the need of a Sunday School, I fear that the rapid decline of home influence, the utter want of discipline, obedience and deference to elders will soon cause it to collapse. Even now it is only kept alive by pandering to the pleasure of the pupils, and by such strong condiments as frequent treats, and indiscriminate prizes.

A strange adventure happened to a clergyman in a neighbourhood where, years ago, I took duty in a building which we called the Chapel Royal. On one occasion he was disturbed at midnight by the arrival, at his retired parsonage, of a carriage and pair. "You must come with us at once," said a strange voice. Mr. A. hesitated, especially when he recognised the livery as belonging to the neighbouring Earl of S. well known for practical jokes. No! no! thought the old gentleman, closing the window, not for Joseph. Another peal at the bell, another peremptory request; a gentleman considerably muffled up, alighting to give it effect.

"You are the Incumbent of G., I presume?" "Yes! What can

you want at this time of night?" "Pardon my intrusion, I am sent from Doctors' Commons with a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and wish you to perform a marriage at B. House; not a moment must be lost."

Homely Parson A., half incredulous, was whirled up the leafless avenue, and at once admitted to the great house. There was still a sound of revelry by night in the chief rooms strangely at variance with the mysterious gloom that marked the spacious bed-chamber which he and the Queen's Proctor entered. A handsome man, pale and emaciated, with a distressing cough, described afterwards by Sir William Gregory as "worn out by dissipation, brandy and water, and a delicate chest," half reclined upon the bed, and bowed to the newcomers with the politeness of a Chesterfield. Young men in evening dress with several ladies came in, until a semi-circle was formed; and then, "the giving and receiving of a ring, and joining of hands."

"Till death us do part," gasped the bridegroom, sinking back.

"You are sure the ceremony was effectually performed," said my genial friend Mrs. E. to Parson A.

"Yes," replied he, "for I am deaf with one ear, and I heard every word."

Mother church was contented, society was satisfied, and the old clergyman more than satisfied. A day or two afterwards Lord S. left B. House alone for the house appointed for all living.

Among curious places of worship where I have taken duty was the Proprietary Chapel in Bath, known as the Octagon, opened for divine service on October 4th, 1767; its first organist being the great astronomer, Sir William Herschel. Built at a time when fashionable dames endorsed the opinion of Lady Harrington: "It is perfectly monstrous for fanatics like Whitefield to declare that persons of quality can be poor miserable sinners like the common people." Therefore the Dowager, Lady Snuphanuph, Miss Bolo, and their select acquaintances, ensconced themselves each Sunday in the four recesses called the drawing-rooms, having fire-places in each, and being situated under the galleries devoted to "menials in livery." Thick curtains separated the silver gilt from the commonalty; and it will scarcely be believed that the table in the centre contained light refreshments, handed round by black pages before the sermon.

To the Octagon flocked the dainty exclusives in Bath in such large numbers that the adjoining Millsom Street was blocked with carriages, and kindly Mrs. Thrale declared they were packed like herrings in a barrel.

Alas! Ichabod may now be written over the portals of this once famous chapel. Its glories have departed. The high-born and high-heeled have tripped into family vaults, and their virtues are writ in marble with a three-inch border of lamp-black. The building is dismantled, and leased for a mundane purpose. The two-manual organ, once played by a Herschel, was sold for £28. This and the

sombre altar-piece, the healing at Bethesda, will find a resting-place in a masonic hall. The octagonal pulpit, so long associated with the oratory of a Magee and an Anderson, went for £1; and the chapel-bell, which had gradually tolled the knell of the congregation, realised £1. 6s. "*Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

Equally quaint is the small semi-private chapel adjoining the manor house at B., both built apparently when George II. was King. Arriving a few minutes before service-time, the only door was closed and the bell in the cupola above had collapsed in straining its voice to bring folks to church. Presently the butler came with the key, when I found, oh! rare circumstance, that the building had not been modernised. Half a dozen oak pews each side of the aisle, and the squire's room, square and spacious, having a sliding panel through which to admonish juvenile rustics seated on the chancel step, which chancel forms an apse adorned with well carved wreaths, and angels' faces turned all ways and smiling still, though some have fallen. The same portly velvet cushions with faded silk fringe, and tattered service books where royalties have been repeatedly deposited, and loose leaves worn to shreds and patches. And oh! that winding stair to the pulpit of which the open door blocked half. When struggling up, I thought of Dean Hook at Winchester (in undertone), "I know I shall never get up. I know I shall never get up. I have got up after all!" There was no vestry, but the high pews concealed the robing, and the congregation might be counted on the fingers; whilst an active player, and a stout little boy at the harmonium, furnished the melody which fluctuated like gas stars on a windy night.

In these days one often hears of services for men only; but I have lately acted as chaplain where only ladies are admitted. An excellent institution is P. College, no doubt, with its salubrious situation, its spacious buildings, and its beautiful little chapel; but I scarcely think Paradise would be perfect without an Adam, and a community of ladies, chiefly spinsters who have passed the grand climacteric, is not exactly expressive of the union of hearts. Sitting at luncheon, I see the portrait of the foundress, good Mistress Ann P., a small face adorned with stiff curls and a spreading turban; kindly-looking, but suggestive of a will of her own. Had she divided her favours between the sexes, fifteen on either side of the quadrangle, "O rapture." Alas!

Man never is but always to be blest;" and ladies living alone are apt to magnify minor miseries. Ask the baker.

"I want new bread, not dough?" snaps Volumina.

"Bring me stale, d'ye hear?" shouts Belinda. "Was ever man so provoking when I begged for kissing crust!" exclaims Mrs. Cluppins.

In opening the service, I feel a little difficulty in the exhortation, "Dearly beloved *brethren*," where not even male babies in arms are admitted, so I drop the voice at beloved, and mindful of Ingoldsby's Miss Penelope Bird, am very careful during the sermon to conceal

any reference to a "horrid male creature." My congregation proved most attentive, and no rubric was needed that "there shall be silence kept for a space," although fifty females were in attendance for an hour and a half.

Alluding to church bells. "When I remember what a gush of euphony voluminously wells" from the stately tower in my late parish for the half-hour previous to the services, shouting down to all the people, and giving no one an excuse for being late, I am sadly surprised to find how little the church bells are used in country parishes in the West of England. Instead of a glorious peal from the lofty tower, all is silent till a few minutes before service, when the only reminder is a halting funereal toll, or the weak tintinnabulation of two or three bells. The consequence is that I am sometimes in danger, like Dean Swift, of addressing "dearly beloved Roger;" and there is a constant clatter of stout boots, and banging of the door until the Psalms, as the congregation, perfectly unconcerned, saunters along the aisles in sections.

I can usually tell also by prevailing apathy or otherwise what has been the character of the "drum ecclesiastic" on other drums. To succeed for a Sunday or two the dead-sea level of monotonous mediocrity, or shallow sermonettes squeezed between elaborate ritual and music; or where pious platitudes furnish the weekly dole, is very trying. Painful is the recent remembrance of an old stager who ought long ago to have left the road, but who still thinks himself the equal of a Liddon or a Lefroy. For him the sun yet stands still upon Gideon and the dying words of Goethe have no meaning; and all discoveries in science, together with the latest and best interpretation of Scripture, are as nothing.

Sydney Smith knew such men who were always looking behind instead of before, and the liberal-minded Doctor Parr declined to preach for one who was his host, which gave rise to the couplet:—

"See a paradox exceeding all paradoxes far,
Here's Parr below the preacher, and the preacher below par."

Preaching is still a power; but it must be up to date, for it is well said: "He who has nothing to learn has nothing to teach," and unless the preacher is in touch, not with a petrified past, but with the living present, and keeps well abreast of the highest instincts of humanity, his voice can only be as "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."



STORIES OF PRISON LIFE.

BY LINDON MEADOWS.

OF MR. ALFRED CARRON ; HIS AFFECTION FOR HIS NIECE, HIS
TENDER CONDUCT TO HIS WIFE, AND HIS KIND ATTENTIONS TO
AN OLD LADY—WHO HAD MONEY.

I WAS going one afternoon, soon after my return from the journey down into Kent, through the inner gate leading into Corridor B, when I heard the cry, "Oh, here's Molly Maggs again!" and retracing my steps, I saw that ill-starred lady between Governor Lambert and Crouch, being convoyed up to the higher tier of cells in the women's ward. They had each tightly hold of her by one arm, the matron pushing behind, and were getting on but slowly, as Molly insisted upon stopping every now and then, declaring that she had a bad cough and her breath was short. This turned out to be merely a clever little *ruse*, however; for the moment her escort, under a charitable impulse, set her free, she gave them such a shower of hearty slaps over the head and ears that they almost began to weigh the propriety of a retreat. Just then she caught sight of my clerical tie, and signalled for a parley.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" I said, sympathisingly.

"Yes, I do wish it; are you—are you the chaplain, may I ask?" returned Molly Maggs, with an articulation of syllables not easily committed to paper.

"I am—at your service."

"Then let's have"—with a hiccup—"another bottle," and even the grim governor himself seemed to enjoy the joke—particularly as it happened to be at my expense.

"This makes the fifty-third time, sir," cried Mrs. Lambert, when they had done laughing; "I declare it's only a week since she went out last."

"I told you how it would be," added the governor, who had subsided into his chronic state of crustiness again; "I have reserved half a dozen blank pages in the gaol book after the entry of this drunken old Jezebel's name, and I warrant they'll all be filled up before this time next year. Now for it, Crouch, don't let go that arm again."

I turned rather despondingly from Mrs. Maggs, and went to talk with a prisoner who had expressed a great wish to see me—No. 34. His name was Carron, a middle-aged man, professed poisoner, sly and subtle as the old serpent himself; deep, dangerous, deadly, diabolical; a villain of the darkest dye. He was ill when he made

his confession; recanted it when well; confirmed his statement again when he thought his time had come; and died at last leaving his repentance a matter of painful doubt.

"I am reduced in appearance and circumstances now, but was once a gentleman"—(heaven save the mark!)"—"and had a fine house, and drove my carriage. My niece had been on a visit to my wife soon after our marriage, and I insured her life for something like two thousand pounds. She knew nothing of it; it was done on her father's suggestion; and at his death, as he owed me money, the policy fell into my hands. Florence Carron now, by my wish, came to live with us, for my object was to get rid of her as soon as possible, that I might reap the benefit of the insurance. I had studied chemistry for many years, as well as read all the medical works, English and foreign, on the science of poisoning. None of these furnished me with a secret suitable to my requirements, however, and I discovered one for myself that baffled all possibility of test. It would be of no particular use to you, perhaps" (here Mr. Carron smiled amiably), "or I should have pleasure in communicating the result of my experiments. To resume. Florence came to live with me, and I began to administer small doses of my new preparation. She was the easier victim, as she thought me one of the kindest uncles and most excellent men in the world. The poison was not to produce any immediate effect, but to work gradually upon her constitution, which was by no means a strong one. She was to fade slowly away, like one in a lingering consumption—and she did. When I had carried this on for about two months, something odd in my manner or proceedings betrayed me to my wife. Matilda was a confirmed invalid, with a distressing heart-disease, and she taxed me with the crime I had in contemplation. It was of no use attempting to deceive her, and I frankly confessed that she was right. She implored me, in the most moving and pathetic terms, to desist; and on my refusing, shut herself up in her room and never again sat at the same table with me. She was a good woman, and I could not help respecting her; but I had made up my mind as to my course, and kept steadily to it. I knew she would never betray me, though she left no stone unturned to drive my niece from the house. Florence was too fond of me, however, to leave against my wish, and I gave her to understand that there was insanity on Mrs. Carron's side of the family; and that, from many things which had lately occurred, I feared it was beginning to manifest itself in her also.

"One day, when Matilda was more than usually anxious about Florence, she came out of her room to the head of the stairs to expostulate with me; so, fearing eavesdroppers, I pushed her in with some violence, and slammed the door, taking care at the same time to hint to my niece and the servants that Mrs. Carron was rather worse, and I apprehended some fatal results from the

excitement under which she occasionally laboured. That same day the doctor called—he often dropped in, but more as a friend than a medical attendant—and said presently, as he sat sipping a glass of wine, ‘By-the-bye, Carron, how ill your niece is looking; there is no consumption in the family, is there?’ ‘No,’ replied I, laughing, ‘not that I ever heard of; she *does* look ill; I will take her away for a little change’—and the next week we went down to Weymouth. My wife got into a terribly agitated state when she learned what I proposed doing, and tried to prevent it by every means in her power; but I was not to be overruled; and as she had grown very troublesome, I resolved, on my return, to get rid of her too. It was easily done. She had been in the doctor’s hands for a considerable time with her heart complaint, and had distressing fainting fits every now and then. One night, therefore, when she had provoked me more than usual, I gave her an awful fright by personating a ghost—and she died instantly. Her life had been insured, and I netted a handsome sum. You are horrified; I can’t help it, there is worse to come. The trip to Weymouth, of course, did Florence no good; I had taken care of that. She kept getting paler and thinner, and the doctor, who had been attending her for some time (as I thought it well to put on a fair show of anxiety), at last, seizing me by the arm, cried, ‘Upon my soul, Carron, your niece’s is a most curious case. I can’t conceive what is the matter with her; there are all the symptoms of—yet that can’t be’—and he looked at the floor with a puzzled expression of countenance. He took her aside before he left, and said, ‘Let me talk to you a bit,’ and asked her a good many questions. When he had gone (shaking his head all the way to the door), Florence tried to reassure me by saying that she felt very well, and I was not to be at all alarmed; and she kissed me affectionately.

“Some days afterwards Dr. Vyse met me in the street, and said he had been carefully diagnosing Florence again, and felt more puzzled and perplexed than ever, and he wished I would allow him to call in a physician from the neighbouring town. I had no alternative but to consent, and the physician came. He asked a number of questions, applied his stethoscope, and begged to see the medicine Florence was taking—for she was under a course of tonics. ‘Yes, very good; nothing could be better; but he would suggest a slight alteration, and come again in a few days.’ In a few days, however, Florence, who had had a longer attack of insensibility than any that preceded, accompanied by a succession of shivering fits, breathed her last in my arms, kissing me fondly as she died, and saying what a good kind uncle I had always been to her.

“Please not to go, I have more to tell you.”

“I hope it is a little less horrible, then,” said I, hesitating, and with a glance of disgust at the prisoner. “I almost regret having listened to you.”

"Be patient a few minutes more. I do not wish to die without having unburthened my mind."

"Unburthen it to God, man, not to me."

"I thought you had nerve."

"Ay, nerve enough to hang you at a minute's notice; but a cold-blooded murder like the one you have described would sicken even an American savage."

"I should like you to hear the rest; it will give me relief as I lie here thinking."

"Go on, then," said I, sitting down again.

"The insurance office paid me every halfpenny of its liabilities without hesitation, and I was now comparatively a rich man. I invested my money advantageously, went to reside for a time on the continent, returned, and settled down once more at O——. Dr. Vyse and I had formerly been good friends, but he had grown shy of me of late; and, after trying hard to win him back, his coldness towards me increasing, I at length gave him up, and we scarcely spoke to one another when we met. About this time an elderly maiden aunt of mine came to reside with me, for I had always been a favourite of hers. She had a handsome property, and promised that it should be mine. Indeed she read the will, and gave it me to keep, as her other nephew, who had gone out to Australia many years before, was believed to be dead, and there was no one else that she cared to leave her money to. This satisfactory state of things continued for twelve months or more, then there came a report that Richard was not dead, but living a wild life somewhere among the bushmen in the interior of the country; and a letter shortly arrived from the man himself, saying that he intended to come home. This involved an alteration in my aunt's will, and one likely to cut me off with about one-third of the property. There was an appointment with the lawyer for the next week. The interval would be valuable to me, and I resolved to rid myself of Miss Burnham without delay; but I was afraid of trying the poison again; the doctor had shaken his head too much about Florence's death, and the insurance company had made some inquiries that were not calculated to strengthen our mutual confidence; besides, it was much too slow in its action. I hit upon a new idea therefore. Miss Burnham came down rather late in a morning, and was very feeble. I watched at my door, waited till she had got to the head of the staircase, then crept quietly out and gave her a smart push, which precipitated her from the top to the bottom and killed her on the spot. I was the first to call for help, to support her shattered frame, and bewail the accident, figuring also as chief mourner at the funeral."

"Have you done, Mr. Carron?"

"Not quite yet. The neighbourhood of my native town began to grow disagreeable to me; people became cold and distant; and I removed to a house which I had bought in the country. Before I

had been six months here, a bank failed, and I was pretty nearly a ruined man. Then some investments in foreign railways came to smash, and that completed the business. I thought I would now go abroad, and forged a merchant's name to a cheque (we had had many dealings together); fingered the cash, secured a passage in a vessel bound for America, was tracked, taken, and brought here—where I am awaiting my trial. The gaol surgeon says I shall not live, and I am glad of it—there, I have eased my conscience; thank you for hearing me out; let me grasp your hand—no? well, as you please. I have no more to say”—and he jerked himself recklessly round, with his face to the wall. He died the next day but one, after having sent for the governor and flung a porridge tin and some other articles at his head.

THE PRINT OF A BLOODY HAND. LEAH HART HAS HER
MEMORY REFRESHED.

I COULD not be mistaken; hers was a face that, once seen, would not easily be forgotten. Five-and-twenty years or more had elapsed since I first caught a glimpse of it, but that strange expression of eye, those remarkable features, were too deeply stamped on my memory ever to be effaced. She did not recognise me evidently, for I was a mere stripling when we last met, and that but for a brief moment.

“What name do you go by?” I asked, looking earnestly at her.

“Margaret Horn.”

“Do you remember the little town of E—— in ——shire?”

“No, sir; I never heard of it.” There was the very slightest start and change of colour, which would not have been perceptible perhaps to any but a keen observer.

“Think again.”

“I do not know any place of that name.”

“Listen,” said I, sitting down, “and I will relate a short story. There was an old gentleman of the name of Pigott, residing in a very pretty house not far from the little country town that I have named. He was rich, and had made a will in favour of a young surgeon—his nephew, I believe—who practised in the immediate neighbourhood. The nephew's name was Hunt. He was a good-for-nothing, dissipated sort of person, and after many attempts to reform him, Mr. Pigott at last took offence at something he had done—some disgraceful gambling transaction, I think—and told him that he would destroy the old will, which left everything to him at his uncle's death, and draw up another, cutting him off with a shilling. Mr. Pigott accordingly wrote to his lawyer, and made an appointment with that gentleman for the Wednesday in the following week. But that Wednesday he was not destined to see, for on the Tuesday morning previously he was found dead in his bed, with his throat cut—no vulgar, hasty gash, but a neat incision, just enough and no more, under the left ear; a razor in

his grasp ; his arms straightened down by his side ; and the bedclothes tidily pulled up to his chin. On the wall, too, just by the door, *there was the print of a bloody hand*—a man's, not a woman's—and, on the floor and staircase, a few crimson drops ; but they reached no further.

"There was no one living at that time under the same roof with Mr. Pigott, but a young woman who acted in the capacity of housekeeper and maid-of-all-work. She was the first to give the alarm and send a message to Mr. Hunt to say what had happened. He came with all speed, went upstairs, shut himself in Mr. Pigott's room, locked up valuables, took possession of keys, carried away numbers of articles to his own house, refused to let any of Mr. Pigott's friends in (it was as much as he would do to admit the constable, who made notes of all he saw), and behaved indeed, on the whole, in a rather unaccountable way for a man whose natural wish ought to have been, instead of preventing inquiry, to throw every possible light upon a matter that, to say the least of it, was attended with some very mysterious circumstances.

"Of course there was an inquest, and the coroner, who was a medical man himself, could not help remarking that the cut under the ear was a *scientific one* ; that it could scarcely have been performed with a razor ; more like the neat nick of a scalpel ; that it was a puzzle how Mr. Pigott could have placed his arms straight down by his side after he had committed the rash act ; how he could have arranged the bedclothes so comfortably round his chin ; how there should be the print of a bloody hand upon the wall, if he had never got out of bed afterwards ; how there should be crimson stains upon the floor and landing ; and how fifty other things for which there was no accounting in any way—except one, he might have added, but did not. That view of the matter, strange to say, did not appear to have been taken by either the coroner or the jury ; the former, it was hinted, being an intimate friend of Hunt's, and the latter a mere pack of boobies, who returned a verdict implicating nobody but Mr. Pigott himself, who was charitably reported to have taken his own life in a fit of temporary insanity.

"Did you find your master's door open or shut when you went in yesterday morning ?' asked a juryman of Leah Hart, the housekeeper.

"Open,' she replied, after some hesitation.

"Was it shut when you went to bed ?—on your oath, mind.'

"I can't remember.'

"Think again.'

"Shut.'

"Will you swear to that ?'

"I can.'

"Why ?'

"I passed it on the way up to my own room.'

"And nobody entered or left the house after you retired for the night ?'

"'No.'

"'Did you find the front and back doors, and the windows, fast in the morning—all as usual?'

"'All as usual.'

"'Humph!'

"And there were no further questions put; nothing that tended to throw suspicion on the man Hunt, who soon afterwards took possession of the property, altered the interior of the house, pulled down the wall on which there had been the print of the bloody hand (for it was said, strive as he would, no water would wash out the mark), made a variety of other improvements, and went to reside in it himself.

"Listen yet; Hunt was not a happy man. He was always looking behind him, as though at somebody or something; he started at the slightest sound; couldn't bear to be left alone; thought of going abroad; changed his mind, for fear of exciting suspicion; took to drinking; had gloomy fits; forbore all allusion to his uncle's name, or the painful circumstances attending his death; and, descending from one stage of degradation to another, died miserably at length, without a soul near to soothe his last moments, or one solitary being to lament his loss.

"A moment longer. The housekeeper, Leah Hart, disappeared soon after Mr. Pigott's death, but returned at irregular intervals of three, six, nine, or twelve months, as the case might be, no doubt to receive or extort the inevitable 'hush-money'; and on one of these occasions, I happened, as I passed on horseback, to see her for a moment. It was late at night, and there were high words between Mr. Hunt and herself at the house door. There was a lamp in the hall, and it fell full on her face. He seemed to be endeavouring to force her out. I dismounted with the intention of inquiring what was the matter, when both disappeared suddenly, and the door was violently slammed upon me. No one knew what had become of Leah. Though her father and mother lived only a little distance from E——, she never visited them again after the mur—— I mean the death of Mr. Pigott. You can probably inform me what became of her."

"I?—how should I know?"

"You bear such a remarkable resemblance to her that I could almost have supposed you to be the woman herself."

"You would find it hard, I think, to prove that."

"At all events it would be, I fear, a little damaging to your interests when you are put upon your trial presently (I forget what you are now charged with) were I to make affidavit to that effect. You were, if not a principal, certainly what the law calls an 'accessory'; there is not a shadow of doubt that you opened the door for Hunt that night; and, when he was gone, chained and bolted it after him."

"I did not; I merely left it un—— I mean I had nothing what ever to do with the murder at all."

"I must leave you now." Leah caught me by the arm.

"For God's sake let the matter drop. I have been punished enough, and never known a minute's peace of mind for years. It can do you little good to rake up the past; it cannot bring a dead man to life," and she burst into an agony of tears.

"True; the secret shall rest with me; reparation is now out of your power, beyond feeling sorrow for what you have done. I will see you again shortly."

A CONVIVIAL PARTY, WHICH HAS A RATHER AWKWARD TERMINATION. MISS SYLVIA IS CONSCIENTIOUS, AND GOES FOR HER FATHER'S GOLD REPEATER.

"Your name, my friend?"

"Benjamin Marks, your reverence—otherwise called the 'Lancashire Chicken' or 'Ben the Bruiser,' as I used to do a little in the prize-fighting line. I'm not in for any new offence now, unless neglecting to report myself as a ticket-of-leave man under police supervision is to be counted as one. It wasn't intentional on my part; I let the proper time to slip, and hope they won't be hard upon me."

"Oh, you are a ticket-of-leave man?"

"Yes, your reverence: I was transported for being concerned in that robbery which took place many years ago (I dare say you heard of it, for it made a great stir at the time) at a rectory down in——shire. I and six or eight more with our faces craped. There was Bristol Joe, Long George, Darkey Sam, Irish Bill, and I forget the names of the others now. We fell into one of the prettiest traps that ever was set for a gang of greenhorns—for greenhorns we were, to fall into it so easily. We had no business there, however, and only got our deserts. Would you like to hear all about it, sir?"

"Yes, I have no objection, as there is a minute or two to spare—go on; tell it in your own way."

"We broke in at the back-kitchen window, and made some noise in doing it, notwithstanding that we had well treacled the pane. There was a man-servant in the house, but he was afraid to come down, and stopped up his ears, and pulled the bedclothes over his head; so Miss Sylvia Harding—that was the lady's name, as well as I can recollect—asked at the top of the stairs, 'Who was there?' As we hadn't our visiting cards in our pockets, and nobody answered, she ventured a little further down, holding a lamp over her head; and Bristol Joe, skipping nimbly up six steps at a time, made her prisoner, saying, as he pushed a pistol into her face, that if she screamed or uttered a word above a whisper, he would blow her brains out. He bade her show where the plate and other valuables were kept; and, ordering two or three of our party as guard at the

staircases and doors, to see that nobody stole out to give the alarm, prepared to follow. 'I have an invalid father,' she said; 'the slightest shock would kill him in a moment; promise me that you will not go near him, or do any violence, and I will put the money and everything you wish into your hands.' Joe promised, and the different places were thrown open to us—sideboard, cupboards, drawers, desks, dressing-cases, and what not. There was a very fair haul, what with silver spoons, forks, trays, tea-services, trinkets, and fifty other things. There was plenty of work for us all in breaking open and stowing away the plunder. We had a large heap of it flung down on the floor, ready for removal; but we had had a long walk, and as our appetites were sharp, and the cloth already laid on the table, Long George and Darkey Sam (against the wishes of Bristol Joe and Irish Bill) insisted upon having something to eat and drink—and plenty of it. Miss Sylvia was quite agreeable, and taking us to the pantry, helped to bring out the different dishes. There was not a bad spread, upon the whole; and next, finding the key, she took us into the cellar, from which we brought up armfuls of bottles covered with sawdust and cobwebs. The key of the ale couldn't be found, but that was no matter, as there was prettier tippie to make up for the loss. 'You are a brave lass,' said Long George, chucking her under the chin; 'and shall sit down at the head of the table and carve for us'—which she did; and twice I saw her give a little laugh. 'Knock off the heads of those bottles, Sam; fill up the glasses—drink, my bully-boys, drink to the health of our pretty hostess; and it should be three times three, too, were it not for frightening the old gentleman up-stairs.' Then all of us rose to our feet and kissed our hands to the lady, while Irish Bill struck up, 'For she's a jolly good fellow;'" but Bristol Joe cried, 'Hold your row, you drunken fool,' and crowned him with an empty pie dish. Well, your reverence, we all ate and drank and enjoyed ourselves tremendously, relieving guard at the doors and staircases that our comrades might have their share of the good cheer also. Then Miss Sylvia, rising, said, looking round with a smile, 'Gentlemen, pray help yourselves, and don't hesitate to pass the bottle; you have behaved so well that I can deny you nothing. I will be strictly conscientious; I promised to put you into possession of all the valuables—I forgot to include my father's gold repeater watch, which is worth a large sum, and hangs at the head of his bed. Shall I go and fetch it?'

"'Fetch it! fetch it!' cried Long George, who had some difficulty in keeping his legs; 'you're a brave lass, and, if I wanted a wife, would be just the girl for my money.' She rose from the table and Bristol Joe, who was nearly rolling from his chair, signalled me to bear her company. She said that must not be, she would go alone; and we were too drunk and reckless to make further remonstrance, but kept knocking the necks of the bottles off and drinking deeper and deeper.

"She had been gone perhaps ten minutes, and growing impatient two of us were just beginning to stagger off after her, when, on a sudden, there was a sound of voices, of doors being flung open, a tramp of heavy feet, and a dozen or fifteen men, armed with guns, swords, spades, pitchforks (one of them had a hayknife tied to a pole), and whatever they in their haste had been able to lay their hands on, burst into the room, bidding us surrender or die !

"We got to our feet as well as we could, and tried to make a stand of it ; but it was of no use, they had the advantage of the situation. Bristol Joe was too drunk to pull out his pistol ; Long George tried in vain to get hold of the carving-knife ; Darkey Sam had a life-preserver in his pocket, but couldn't tell in which ; so as the muzzles of the fowling-pieces were within a yard of our heads, and fresh men came dropping in—all armed to the teeth—we considered it only prudent to give ourselves up ; were made prisoners, bound hand and foot, like so many plump birds ready trussed for the spit, and the next morning lodged in gaol. Miss Sylvia, instead of going for her father's watch, had got slyly out by a secret door, roused the neighbours round, and carried all before her. The robbery was altogether a failure, but the supper, your reverence, never was anything like that, before or since ; and it was well worth serving seven years in a penal settlement to have been one of the party !"

BLACK MARIA. GOVERNOR LAMBERT AND THE WARDERS, ASSISTED BY GULLIVER, JOIN IN AN EXCITING LITTLE GAME AT HARE AND HOUNDS.

BLACK MARIA was the van used for conveying prisoners to and from the assizes ; a long, sombre-looking affair, not unlike a huge funeral hearse or gigantic coffin on wheels, and thus christened in days past by some facetious unknown, who had probably figured in one of its graceful compartments. Governor Lambert had had it constructed on a principle of his own, and prided himself a good deal upon the impossibility of an escape from it. Nothing appears to be impossible, however, to a man of tolerable ingenuity, who bides his time, and knows how to turn an opportunity to account. The prisoners on these occasions were not only handcuffed, but secured each to a solid horizontal bar that ran parallel with either side of the dismal vehicle. The door was of course locked, and the governor and one turnkey sat on the box in front, while another occupied a sort of little nook behind, reserved for his especial comfort and convenience. **Black Maria** was on her way back to the gaol from the town in which the assizes had been held, and all was going on most satisfactorily when, on a sudden, there was a cry from within that one of the prisoners was taken ill, and notwithstanding the gratings above, wanted air. This was viewed by the governor as a mere trick, and at first he refused to let Dance, who

was driving, pull up; but the noise growing louder, he was fain to order a halt and desire Crouch, who sat behind, to see what was the matter. Crouch, accordingly, opened the door and allowed the afflicted party to breathe a little pure oxygen. The man had felt ill, no doubt, and, on his reviving, the lock was about to be shot again, when a huge fellow, nicknamed "Gulliver," who had been sentenced to fourteen years' penal servitude, by some clever and unaccountable means managed to free himself from the bar, and, manacled as he was, to leap out. Down sprang Crouch also (in his haste leaving the van-door unlocked), and flew off in hot pursuit. Gulliver, who had full use of his legs, jumped a hedge, scoured over a neighbouring field, and made rapidly up a railway embankment, amid the loud shouts and uproarious fits of laughter of his admiring comrades. "Go it, Gulliver!" "Well done, Gulliver!" "Gulliver on his travels—ha! ha! ho! ho! ten to one on Gulliver; he's down on his back—no, he's up again; he'll get off; hurrah! hurrah!"—and mad attempts were made on the part of some of the others to follow suit. Lambert, who had been left with the reins, now scrambled from the box, and rushing to the door—for the keys were yet hanging there—shut and secured it; but, startled by the hubbub, and the roar and rattle of an express train that came dashing by, the horses took fright and galloped off, dragging Black Maria partly into a ditch and very nearly upsetting her. The scene now had assumed a very ridiculous aspect; Dance and Crouch, gesticulating fiercely, were following madly on the heels of the runaway, who was distancing them fast; while Governor Lambert, without his hat, his hair resolving itself into all sorts of agreeable arrangements, was endeavouring to overtake the van, and shouting vainly to the terrified horses to "woa! woa! woa!" Fortunately they did "woa" just in time to save themselves and those sitting behind them from a very serious accident; but in the interim Gulliver had got clear off, and the two baffled warders came ingloriously back, saying that the man was out of sight and nothing more could be done at present. Governor Lambert was in a pretty way; he stamped, and swore, and blustered, and bullied, but it was all of no use, and Dance was left behind to give the alarm about the country, and at the neighbouring police-stations, doing his work so well that the enterprising Mr. Gulliver's travels were put an effectual stop to towards evening, and the next day, rather flushed with the recent escapade, he was safely lodged in the county gaol again. He was not taken without a stout struggle, however, as well as a broken head or two and some bruised shins on the part of his captors; but a handsome *douceur* from Lambert served to bandage the one, and heal the others. I had the whole story afterwards from Dance, who called me into an empty cell and related it with infinite humour and relish.

THE STORY OF THE THIRD BURIED TREASURE—WHICH MUST REMAIN
A BURIED TREASURE STILL.*

It will be remembered that Joel Crane had told me of two prisoners who were anxious to make confession to me respecting the stolen property which they wished restored to their owners. Of the cash-box that Emery Barrs had taken from Dr. Gale's parlour and hidden in a grave, with the particulars of its recovery by myself, the reader has already heard; and I am now about to tell him—or her—of another treasure that a prisoner, who is not for a moment to be classed with the common thief or ruffian, secreted on an uninhabited island abroad, and which I much fear, unless I make a purposed visit to unearth it myself (which I am not exactly in a position to do) is likely to remain unappropriated for ever.

On entering Malcolm Graham's cell—this was his real name, and not Revill—I found him to be the same man whom I had reported to the prison-surgeon a short time before as being seriously ill and not likely to live.

"Oh, nonsense!" he had said, with a laugh; "the fellow is only shamming."

"There is no sham, Rayner," I replied. "I warn you that No. 31 will die; and I am witness that he has not received proper medical attention."

"I will take all the responsibility, my dear Mr. Meadows. You are too soft-hearted—too easily imposed upon. You don't know the tricks of these——"

"There is no trickery here; I don't believe he will be alive three days hence."

On the next but one Graham died, and Mr. Rayner acknowledged, though with too much indifference, I thought, that he had been a little out in his calculation in this case, begging me to say as little about it as possible in any report I had to make to the visiting justices.

"Nothing that is now said can remedy the matter—only be careful in future how you persist in thinking a poor fellow to be shamming when he is as innocent of any wish or attempt to deceive as you are yourself. With Lambert expostulation would be useless; but you are made of different stuff, I hope, and ought to know how to distinguish between pretence and reality;" and as Rayner put out his hand for me to shake, I accepted it, though rather reluctantly. I am anticipating, however.

Graham, who was in bed, signed for me to sit down beside him.

* There were two other instances in which—with better success than in the present one—I was the means of restoring buried plate to the owners; but as these were not strictly connected with my gaol ministrations, I reserve the accounts of them for some separate collection of stories.—L. M

"I am not long for this world," he said; "and as you have been kind to me, I am anxious to put you in possession of a secret that it may be worth your while to know. Turned to proper account, it will make your fortune."

I shook my head.

"Crane told me that you had money hidden somewhere; but I thought you wanted me to find and give it back to those who——"

"This belongs to me, sir, and to no one else," said Graham proudly; "and I have a right to do what I please with it. I will not deny that I have been reckless and rash, and often guilty of violence; but these diamonds are my own property. I intended them for my daughter. She died, and I have no one now to care about, or to care about me."

He threw himself back on the bed, and was silent for some minutes.

"Well, that is all over and done with now. Let me go on. When I was a young man—and I am a gentleman by birth—I went out to the gold diggings in California, remained there some years, and got together a good bit of money by the sale of my nuggets, many of which were large and of great value. On my return to England I married, and after a time, the old roving fit coming on me again, left my wife with her mother, and sailed for Australia, where I stayed several years—some spent at Melbourne, and some in the gold-fields; then, enticed by the glowing accounts received from that quarter, started for the diamond mines at the Cape, bought up all the finest stones that I could lay my hands on—finding many myself that were worth a considerable sum—till, my health giving way from exposure and privation, I was compelled to leave the country.

"On reaching England, I learned that my wife was dead, and having no home ties now worth speaking of to detain me here, I thought I would take my little daughter Eugénie out to Canada, carrying my diamonds with me, for which I had not yet found a market, the London jewellers wanting them very much under their value, and some Rotterdam merchants, who had come over to look at them, being still less liberally disposed. For security's sake I had a belt made to contain them, and always wore it round my body. I had to defend this many times at the risk of my life; but I knew well how to handle a revolver—I may add, a bowie-knife, too—and when attacked, there were less dangerous men to deal with. Indeed, my hasty temper, which was hair trigger, often got me into trouble (as you will see by-and-by), and in the end brought me into this dismal place.

"While in Quebec, I was induced by some rough and rollicking companions whom I met in a boarding-house to accompany them into the Far West beyond the chain of lakes on a buffalo-hunting expedition, which was just the style of life to suit my tastes and temperament; so I put my daughter Eugénie to school in a convent and joined the party.

"While in the Rocky Mountain territory, to which our love of adventure led us, we had the misfortune to be twice attacked by a band of prairie pirates. The first time we escaped pretty well, receiving only a few harmless flesh wounds, and losing nothing; but the second we came to grief. All my comrades were killed and scalped—there being several painted red men among the marauders—and though I contrived to gallop off in the fray, I was pursued, made prisoner, and only spared on condition (for they saw that I was a determined fellow) that I took some horrible oaths and joined the band. These terms I thought it wise to accept, particularly as the pirate captain—a huge villain with one eye and long black flowing hair—had transferred my belt to his own accursed carcase, cleverly hoodwinking the others (who thought it to be a mere belt) as to the true value of his prize. He did not live to enjoy it long, though.

"One day, thinking he could perform the duty better himself, he went to watch on a neighbouring bluff for the approach of a party of emigrants with their mules and waggons, and I begged leave to accompany him, saying that I should relish the adventure and wanted a little talk. He agreed, and we rode off together. When we had got to a convenient distance from the camp, I dismounted, keeping close to his side, and bade him do the same, if he had the spirit of a man about him. 'What do you mean?' he asked, turning pale. 'Foot to foot, and hand to hand, with our hunting-knives. You stole my belt—there were twenty of you to one then—and I mean to have it back. Nay, no drawing of pistols: two can play at that;' and, dragging him down, I flung his revolver to a distance. 'Now, defend yourself!'

"It was for his life. He knew it, and the struggle was a long and terrible one; but I was the victor, and as his horse was the fleetest animal of the two, I mounted him and rode away, with the belt once more safe round my waist. I need hardly tell you that the rest of the gang were soon on my trail; but I had learned a clever prairie trick or two while among them, and succeeded in effecting my escape, though two fell by my revolver, and a third had a taste of my steel between his ribs as he leaped on my horse and tried to throw me from the saddle.

"In the course of time—but it was a long and tedious business getting back—I reached my old quarters in Quebec again, and learned that my poor little Eugénie had sickened and died during the first month of my absence. I was inconsolable, and spent whole nights beside the grave, wildly kissing the turf that wrapped her clay. I cared little for life now, and could scarcely tear myself away from Quebec; but succeeded at last, and reached Montreal, intending to make my way by Kingston Niagara, Buffalo, and Albany, to New York.

"I had not been long in Montreal before I felt an unconquerable yearning to go down to Quebec again and revisit little Eugénie's

grave; and back I went. I threw myself down by it and wept like a child, feeling strongly tempted to put my revolver to my head and end my sorrows there. I should have done so, I believe, except for a good old Roman Catholic priest, who endeavoured to console me, and took me to his house. When the fit had passed off, I started on my travels again, thinking some day to return to my child's grave and die there; and once more reached Montreal. While here, I got involved in a quarrel with some ruffians at one of the principal hotels. They were sharpening upon a poor young English nobleman; and, tearing the cards from their hands, I exposed the trick. Pistols were drawn in an instant, and, mine being always ready, I shot down one of the sportsmen (as blacklegs are generally called in that country) and severely wounded another. The owner of the hotel, being a rogue himself, and evidently a confederate, tried, with several more who rushed in from the bar, to seize me, and I shot him down too; then there was a terrific struggle, and seeing that matters looked bad, I was persuaded by an English officer, whom I knew, to escape while there was a chance, or it might go hard with me; and he contrived, with one of his friends, to get me out of the room.

"A false account of the affair, however, being given to the police, there was a hot pursuit; so I disguised myself, and after many hair-breadth adventures and escapes there is no time to tell now, contrived to get as far as the Lake of the Thousand Isles. You know it, then? I am glad to hear you say so, for reasons presently to be explained. Well, finding soon that the bloodhounds were on my trail, and determining to throw them off, I bribed the steward of the steam vessel—for I had plenty of money—to put a supply of provisions, with a number of other things, into the little boat astern; and watching my opportunity, slid down into her under cover of the night (we had been detained on the way—our stock of coals having run short); cut the tow-line, and allowed myself to drift alongside of the nearest island.

"I had abundance of choice, for there are, as you know, upwards of eighteen hundred of them.

"The steward had flung a bit of spare canvas into the boat; with this I soon made a sort of tent, but forbore to light a fire, fearing it might put the pursuers on my track. I passed the night very comfortably, and as soon as it was light next morning, hid my boat under the overhanging foliage. I was haunted by the fear of capture, however, and resolved that, if taken, no one should possess himself of my diamonds. I thought it would be prudent to *cache* them. The island I was at present on did not please me, so, first climbing a tree, to see if there was any danger of discovery I paddled off to another of about an acre in extent, and more picturesque. I chose my spot, dug a hole with a hatchet, and transferring the diamonds from my belt to a tin canister, dropped it in. It contained about eighteen thousand pounds' worth of stones (I had been offered

fifteen thousand by the Rotterdam merchant); five hundred Spanish gold pieces, which had belonged to the prairie-pirate captain—or rather to those whom he had robbed—and a splendid chain with a sliding clasp, made up of three pear-shaped brilliants of the first water. There were several other things, but I forget exactly what now.

"I was glad I had buried them, for the trackers dodged me from island to island, and once I should have been taken had I not used my revolver. Two of the most skilful detectives had engaged to capture me without further help, and had been dropped ashore quietly while the steamer went on her course, arranging to call again for them (and me) on the return journey. When she came back, however, a dead silence reigned around; and after repeated signalling, she passed on. The two trackers lay dead not far from the spot where they had landed.

"I knew that there would be another party sent off, but did not expect it to show in such force. There were some really clever fellows now on the scent; and after a week's manœuvring, they seized me as I lay asleep under a tree—but not before I had mortally wounded three of them, and maimed another for life. I was taken on board the steamboat the next day but one, closely guarded, conveyed back to Montreal, and put in the gaol there. Some of my old enemies from the — hotel came to insult me, but took care to keep out of arm's length.

"A night or two afterwards I was free again. Two of the officers of the —th, grateful to me for having exposed the tricks of the card sharpers, and saved their comrade from a fleecing, swore to effect my escape—and succeeded. I was smuggled off, under a new disguise, down Lake Champlain to New York, and my passage money paid to England on board one of the first-class American liners. Nor did Lord C——'s liberality end here, for, on parting, he pushed a purse containing a handsome sum into my hands, and told me that he was still very deeply my debtor. 'I accept it simply as a loan,' I replied, intending to return it as soon as possible.

"That was not to be. On returning to England, and leaving the theatre one night, I was fool enough to interfere in a street row, and protect a lady and gentleman who were being insulted by the mob. I got mixed up in the affair in such a way that, being mistaken for one of the wrong party, the police laid hands on me, and I was too angry to enter into explanations. Drawing the small sword from the cane that I always carried with me, I ran it through the inspector's body; but there were twenty to one against me, and I was overpowered, seized, brought before a bench of magistrates, and sent here; though with a light sentence, as it was proved afterwards that I had not acted with any malicious intent; only in self-defence; and, but that I feel death approaching, I should shortly be free. I

received several ugly wounds in that street scuffle; and these, with the excitement, and loss of rest, and a constitution weakened by all sorts of hardships and privations, have proved too much for me. I am grateful to you for having listened to a long story, and for the kindness and sympathy that you have shown. Let me shake your hand once more."

Graham was silent for a few moments; and I did not interrupt him; then he looked up at me and said, "My time on earth grows short, and I wish to be prepared for the change. Those diamonds and gold pieces are to be yours."

"I cannot accept them; have you no one to whom they can be left?"

"No one; they are to be yours."

I shook my head.

"Yours. I have been guilty of neither robbery nor violence, except such as was necessary to the protection of my own life; and there is no stain or disgrace whatever attached to them."

I continued to shake my head. "Leave them to some charity."

He grew flushed and angry. "I feel worse than I did, and may not live till the morning. It will relieve my mind if you will make notes of the position of the island, and the spot where the diamonds lie."

"As you please."

Here followed the particulars, respecting which he was most minute, telling me that the jewels were placed in an old tin canister, which the steward of the steam-vessel had thrown, with other things, into the boat. "A word more," he said, grasping my hand again, "promise me, if you visit Quebec, to place a few flowers on little Eugénie's grave."

The next day Graham grew worse, but the gaol-surgeon persisted in it that this was all sham, and put on merely to excite sympathy and shirk the cleaning of the cell. Twelve hours afterwards the prisoner died, and Rayner and I did not speak to one another for several days.

Some time had passed since the death of Graham, and I had told the particulars of his story to a friend who often visited my house. He was a young man of about eight-and-twenty, with black hair and moustache, and a sharp, fox-like, sinister expression of countenance. He pooh-poohed the whole thing, and wondered how I could be so credulous; threw himself back in the chair, laughed, pulled hard at his cigar—and poured a volume of smoke towards my study ceiling.

"Well, Coles, on consideration, I am inclined to agree with you; and there the matter may end."

A few nights afterwards he came, as usual, to smoke a cigar, play a game of chess, and sip a cup of coffee. There was evidently something on his mind.

"Meadows, do you know I have been thinking over that queer

story of yours about the diamonds and Spanish gold pieces, and it is just possible there may be something in it."

"Ah, but you are too sanguine; we agreed to drop the subject, you remember—check to your queen."

"No, but really, the man may have spoken the truth."

"Still, who is to go exploring among nearly a couple of thousand uninhabited islands in search of a tin canister?—the next move of the black knight gives me the game; you do not play with your usual care."

"Come now, I have a proposal to make to you," said Coles—but without looking me in the face. "I have long been thinking of a trip to America. I could go out by Quebec, make my way up the St. Lawrence, and round by Buffalo to New York, taking this famous Lake of the Thousand Isles in the way. Give me an exact description of the place where the diamonds are hidden, and I will dig them up for you."

"On what terms?"

"Oh, as a mere matter of friendship; you know I am well off."

"That would not be fair. Suppose I give you a third for your trouble?"

"No; but if you like, you could pay the extra expenses of the journey through Canada."

"I will think of it; but it is right that you should have a share of the spoil."

Coles laughed and said, "Well, we'll talk of that again by-and-by; do you mind showing me your plan of the *cache*?"

"Not now."

He was more pressing when he came the next time, but I still held back; and, on finding me firm, he went away in almost an ill temper.

I had entire confidence in this gentleman's honour, and was surprised presently to receive a visit from an intimate friend of his, who explained his errand as follows:—

"You know Humphrey Coles?"

"Yes, he often comes here."

"But you are not perhaps aware that he is addicted to play, and has run through all the property that came to him at his father's death?"

"No; you surprise me. I met with him at a friend's house; he was fond of chess and invited himself here. I had taken the liberty of inquiring into his affairs."

"He is rather talkative, and, I fear, not over scrupulous; in fact, that is, I would not rely on his—discretion. If you have entrusted him with any important service abroad, take my hint and act upon it."

"I am obliged to you, and will."

Coles had evidently betrayed my confidence. I saw now why he had been so anxious to get possession of my secret.

When he next called, I had an engagement, and did not receive him with my wonted cordiality.

"How is this, Meadows? no shake of the hand? no chess? no chair?"

"You are not what I believed you to be, Mr. Coles. You have made a public matter of what was a strictly private one. I cannot trust you any more. I was too open and unsuspicious."

"You astonish me, and shall answer for this."

"In what way? explain yourself; there is no time like the present. What, would you threaten! then listen, sir. I am a clergyman, and a man of peace; but nobody breathing bullies me. You bragged about your fencing; here are a couple of foils; touch me if you can, and see what chance you would have with the buttons off?—bah! I have hit you on the breast twice. Let our acquaintance end here—good evening!"—and I rang the bell for the servant to show him out. He was in a towering passion, and strode away vowing deadly vengeance.

Three months passed, and I fell into company with a young officer who was going out to join his regiment at Montreal. A friendship had sprung up between us; and finding him a true gentleman, I told him the story of the diamonds. "Egad!" cried he, "it is just the sort of adventure to my mind. I think there may be some truth in what Graham told you, and will spare no pains to find the tin canister. Give me your plan of the island, and particulars of *cache*. I will keep them on my person; and should anything happen to me, or should I be unable to carry out the undertaking, they shall be returned in a sealed letter."

"I had better guard, however, against the possibility of the secret's falling into other and less worthy hands. We will omit all mention of the thousand islands, and the rest shall be put in such a way as to be of no use to anybody but yourself."

In about four months' time from that date, I received a letter from a brother officer of O'Brien's, to say that the latter was dead (he had been carried off by a severe attack of Canadian cholera, immediately upon drinking the St. Lawrence water); accompanied by a small carefully-sealed packet containing the little map and hieroglyphics that had been entrusted to his care. So much for attempts Nos. 1 and 2.

My third was in the person of the captain of a merchant vessel, bound for Baltimore—in whose word and honour strict reliance could be placed. He undertook to "run up" to the Thousand Isles, unearth the famous tin canister, and hand to me intact, trusting to my generosity what amends I chose for his trouble. Alas! "man proposes, and God disposes." Circumstances into which I cannot now enter, rendered it impossible for Captain Ridley to perform his promise, and the map of the *cache*, that he put with such care into his pocket-book, and would be only so much waste-paper to a finder, may be

flying about the world to this hour, for anything I know to the contrary.

In the course of time, circumstances seemed to favour a fourth attempt to get possession of Graham's jewels and gold pieces. A great botanist was on his journey up the lakes; and after a good deal of conversation on the subject, he expressed a wish to make the necessary explorations, though he was little sceptical as to the result, being in fact doubtful whether Graham had ever buried any diamonds at all.

"Don't put yourself to the trouble, my good doctor," said I, "it will be no easy task, and I cannot press it upon you."

Like the lazy fish that has had the bait dangled enticingly before his nose and then drawn away, he grew only the more eager in proportion as I grew the more indifferent, and, in the end, received all my instructions and sailed for Canada. I heard nothing of him for a long, long time, and then back he came, with a fine collection of botanical specimens, and a good deal of general information on a vast number of interesting scientific subjects, but—without the celebrated tin canister. "And now pray tell me, doctor," said I, "how you went to work?"—and I had difficulty in repressing my mirth, for he had never been within a mile of the spot I had described! He had lost his paper of instructions, too, but that mattered little, as they were couched in terms quite unintelligible to any but the initiated.

ENGLISH RISPETTI.

CELANDINE.

Wordsworth's own flower, of humbleness the soul—

An eye that seems to brood on its own heart,

Full open to the sun, serenely whole,

That knows no surfeiting of any part.

Sweet flower, a poem in thy mystic air,

A lyric in thy grace, retiring, fair.

I cannot sing thee, or I fain would sing,

But thee to name is grace of song to bring.

THE HYACINTHS.

Within the wood, like sky bedropt on earth,

Ye make a wonder to the loving eye,

With all the secret of the gentle mirth

That dwells within the blue of summer sky.

How sweet to wander on the wilds and see

Your tender eyes look forth inquiringly,

As tho' ye felt the mystery of life,

And sought a panacea for the strife.

A. H. JAPP, LL.D.

THE INFERNAL MACHINE.

BY GEORGE FOSBERY.

UGH, what a night it was ! 'Twas as if the usual winter slush of the London streets had vaporised itself, and settled down again in the atmosphere as fog.

Then it was Christmas Eve. That made it worse. The poor in London often find it hard enough to keep up their spirits in spite of cold, starvation, and neglect. Yet even to the most miserable and desperate of us all, the commotion that heralds Christmastide, the busy going to and fro of those with money to buy, and the hearty display on the part of those who have anything to sell—all these are something to see, even if you haven't sixpence to buy a dinner with, or a friend on earth to greet with the "Compliments of the Season." But when King Fog blurs and overshadows everything, the temper of the unfortunate classes is severely tried.

I was very savage that night ; savage with myself, savage with my employers, and savage most of all with my miserable lot in life. Once on a time I was a well-to-do householder, with a flourishing watch and clock-maker's business. But after a while things went badly, somehow or other, and I suppose I took more than was good for me. At last the business broke up ; and then—but there ! what's the use of looking back ? I had now joined the ranks of the struggling and hopeless, and it seemed hard that, half suffocated with fog, I should be trudging the grimy streets between Clerkenwell and St. James's with a heavyish weight to carry on such a night and at such a season, while the rich and fortunate were eating and drinking and enjoying themselves more than was good for them. Bah ! it made my blood boil to think of it ! And yet I felt the justice of it all. It was cause and effect. As we make our bed, so we must lie upon it.

The fog grew so thick as I went along that I—I who have been familiar with every square yard of London ever since I can remember knowing anything—came for a moment to a standstill, and had to admit that I had lost my way. I knew well enough how I had come—Red Lion Square, High Holborn, Broad Street, and the Dials. I ought to be in Cranborne Street, or Leicester Square ; but, for the life of me, I could not see two yards in front to make sure.

Only with some difficulty did I ascertain that there were houses at three paces distance. I resolved to push on, however, keeping my disengaged hand upon the walls and lintels and doors, in order to have something substantial to go by. Even this was awkward, and my progress soon became slower than ever. So thick was the fog,

that with my hand on a lamp-post I literally could not distinguish the flame of the gas above me. Nevertheless I stumbled onwards in hope of meeting someone to direct me. But no one came in sight. I suppose I had got into a slum; one of those places where, they say, so many foreign desperadoes lie in hiding; and I was musing on the evil repute of some of the back streets in the most luxurious city in the world, when all of a sudden I was roughly seized, and before I had time to use my tongue I was dragged within a neighbouring doorway. The door was immediately slammed, and ruthless hands hustled me down a dark passage and into a back room, from which (I felt sure) it was impossible to summon assistance, however loudly I employed my lungs.

Happily I was not injured in any way—only greatly alarmed; and fortunately I had retained enough presence of mind to hold tight the handle of the wooden box which I carried in my hand. If I had dropped it! Well, I would rather not speculate upon what would have happened if I had dropped that box.

The room into which I had been thrust was lighted by a single gas-jet. There was nothing about the apartment itself to suggest that my life was in danger, for it was an ordinary sitting-room fitted up with something like feminine care. But I was very quickly made to understand by the men who had dragged me into the house that they were capable of anything in pursuit of their object. There were only two scoundrels present, though it had seemed as if a full score were taking me prisoner.

"Now!" began one of the bullies, a cross-eyed burly brute, standing between me and the door.

"Well," I said, as he paused. The box I carried was rather heavy. I placed it cautiously upon the table in the centre of the room, and asked: "Pray what is the meaning of this treatment?"

"Money," replied the burly blackguard, with laconic frankness.

The second ruffian, who was meantime looking at me over his friend's shoulder, confirmed this explanation with a nod; but the request, or rather demand, made to a man in my position of life seemed to me so absurd that I could not restrain a little laugh.

The cross-eyed party frowned angrily.

"We can't stop here all night," he blurted out in menacing tones.

"I'm sure I don't wish you to do so," I rejoined, trying to gain time.

"Well, then, out with the blunt!" put in the second bully; "and look sharp!" Saying which, he drew from his pocket a life-preserver, (as people are pleased to call the murderous weapon).

"Really, gentlemen," I answered pacifically, "I am sorry I cannot oblige you. At the present moment I don't possess a cent in the world."

"Won't do," returned the cross-eyed one incredulously. "Gammon—flam—bunkum! Turn out your pockets."

"With pleasure," said I, being anxious to promote a feeling of confidence, and suiting my action to the words.

The second ruffian approached and helped me. He handled my pockets and patted my waistcoat to satisfy himself that I hid nothing. It soon became clear that I had spoken the truth, and he returned to his place between the table and the door to consult with his comrade as to their next step.

"What have you got in that box?" then inquired the gentleman with duplex sight, perceiving for the first time that I had at least one portable article in my possession. "What's inside that box?"

"That is my business," I replied sharply.

"Come, come, we don't want any of your pertness. Open up, and look spy about it."

"No."

"Yes," he roared, adding a frightful expression which I should be sorry to repeat.

"No," I said, very firmly.

The two men glanced at one another. My opposition was beginning to enrage them. I wondered what they would do next. They evidently meant mischief, and I anxiously watched the burlier blackguard as he hesitated, and then apparently determined to open the box himself. He stepped forward.

"Good Heavens!" I cried, holding out my hand to stop him. "You don't know what you are doing! You will be blown to atoms!"

The man started back as if he had been struck. I pursued my advantage, after a little smile at the situation.

"I will open the outer case," said I, after a pause, "and explain. But by all that's sacred, if either of you comes one step nearer, I'll touch the spring, and we'll all go to atoms together! Do you think I'd stick at finishing the business? Do you think a man cares two straws about what happens to him when he makes an infernal machine, and carries it about, dynamite and all, on his way to set the blessed thing going in a tidy corner of—well, no matter where—for the good of his country?" The two ruffians stood as if turned to stone. "Ha, ha!" I laughed. "You don't know what stuff an Anarchist is made of!"

The bullies turned as pale as ghosts. They had not bargained for this sort of thing. I gave them no time to doubt me and recover. In a moment I inserted a key in the lock of my wooden case, turned it, and raised the lid. Opening an inner mahogany box, I displayed the face of a dial.

"This," I said solemnly, "is the clock. If I turn *this* screw I set the indicator for whatever hour or minute I desire. If I touch *this* button, I start the exploding mechanism. *This* brass rod ends in a detonating fuse. *I have only to release this spring, and blow the whole street down.*"

My cowardly captors uttered an exclamation of surprise and terror. They seemed to have entirely lost their power of articulate speech.

I looked at a clock—a trumpery, cheap, French ticker—on the mantel-piece, and continued remorselessly.

"It is four minutes to ten. I will now turn the screw, and set the indicator to explode at ten. I will then touch the button, and set the dynamite mechanism in motion. This will give you three minutes to open this door and the front door—wide—and to make yourselves scarce. If you don't do so, pretty quick, the infernal thing will take its course—and I don't think I should meet either of you in Paradise."

The two ruffians, petrified with terror, glared at me while I made the necessary movements.

"Now," I said, firmly, "you have three minutes in which to do as I said. And remember—at the very first sign of any attempt at violence, I touch this spring under my finger and blow you both to smithereens. Now—only two minutes and a half left."

The cross-eyed villain glanced at me, then at his comrade, and lastly at the face of the dial. A bare two minutes of respite remained. But it was enough for him to deliver a parting shot, in words that forced themselves hoarsely from his throat.

"Well," he said, "of all the Mephisto-pheelses I ever set my blessed eyes on, you're the most horrible!"

And without another word he and his horror-stricken companion hurried out. There was but one minute more to go. They were clearly awake to that.

I heard them fling the front door open hastily, and run clattering along the pavement in the street—for dear life. There was not the slightest chance they would attempt to interfere again with the Anarchist.

I shut up my box in its case, and taking it by the handle, quickly made my way out into the street. The fog had lifted slightly. I perceived that there was a bye-street opposite, and I ran down it as fast as my legs would carry me.

Before very long I found myself in Leicester Square, and in another ten minutes I rang the bell at the back door of a well-known clock and watch-maker's shop in St. James's.

The door was opened by my employer.

"Confound it all, Jeremy!" he said; "I thought you were going to fail me. Have you brought the chronometer?"

"Here it is, sir. One-pound-ten, please. And here's my little account for repairs and other work. It's been owing some time."

"Come in, Jeremy, and I'll give you your money, and a glass of grog. You're only just in time with the chronometer. Lord Bluebury starts the first thing to-morrow morning to meet his yacht in the Mediterranean, and he wouldn't go without the instrument for anything."

"Well—here's the article, and a very pretty old time-keeper it is too. You don't see anything to beat it nowadays. I told you you'd have it to-night, and I never tell an untruth to anybody."

And then I remembered that what I was asserting as to my truthfulness was not strictly accurate. But I said nothing more; for, if I had confessed how near I had been to losing Lord Bluebury's valuable chronometer altogether, I'm sure I should never have been given another job to do at home so long as I lived.

It was a narrow escape, that little adventure. But I can't help laughing to myself whenever I think of poor Jeremy as a full-blown Anarchist.

"Of all the Mephisto-pheelses I ever set my blessed eyes on," said the cross-eyed gentleman, "you're the most horrible!"

And yet you wouldn't think it to look at me.



STANZAS.

THE chill breath of autumn comes mournfully sighing,
 As it sweeps o'er the breast of the far sounding main;
 And the waves, as they curl, to its sad tones replying,
 Wake up the heart's buried enjoyments again.
 I call back life's Spring, with its blossoms and flowers,
 The tears of its April, the mirth of its May;
 I mourn the lost joys of its sweet summer bowers,
 Where Love's sun shone bright, and Hope danced in its ray.

Alas! 'tis in vain. These chill winds are revealing
 How the autumn of life sweeps too rapidly on;
 How winter's bleak footfall is silently stealing
 To wither Hope's blossoms till all—all are gone!
 Yet, yet, ye are welcome, ye winds with your warning,
 Ye billows whose murmurs so sadly reply;
 When life's winter's past, there's a bright spring day dawning,
 Where age never comes and where hearts never sigh!

MATTHEW ROBINSON.

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